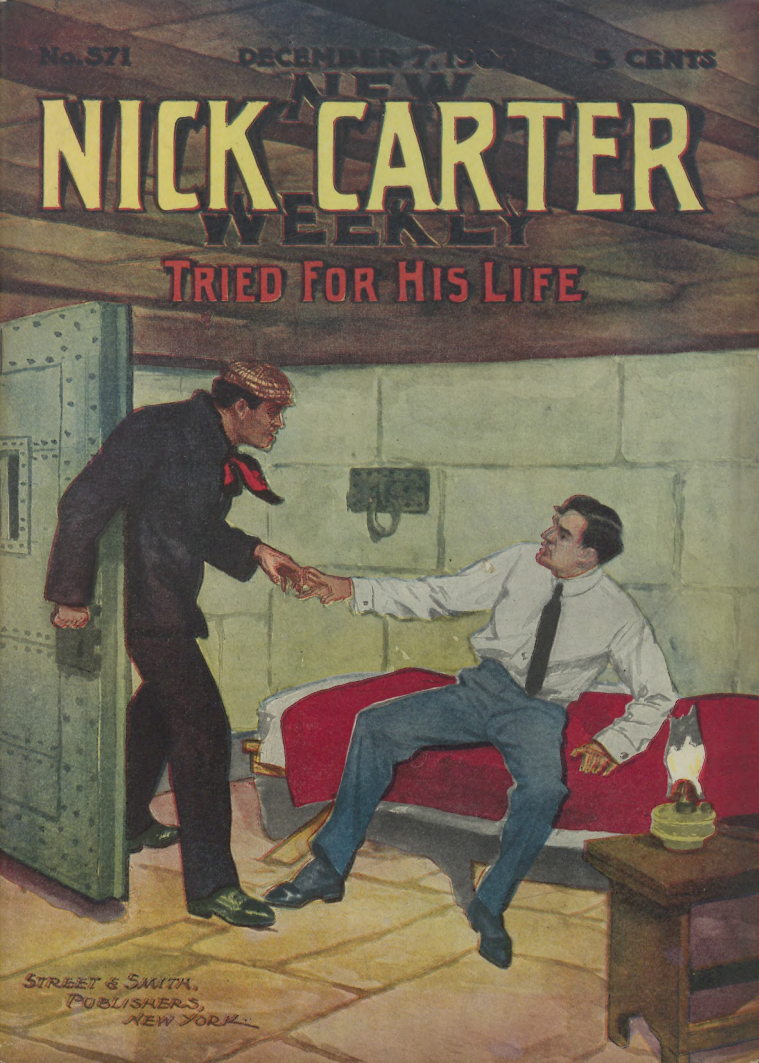
No. 571 DECEMBER 7, 190[illegible] 5 CENTS

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

TRIED FOR HIS LIFE



STREET & SMITH, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK.

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Avenue, N. Y. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1907, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C.*

No. 571. NEW YORK, December 7, 1907. Price Five Cents.

TRIED FOR HIS LIFE;

OR,

PATSY'S TERRIBLE ORDEAL.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

RED MORGAN OF BOSTON.

Red Morgan came over from Boston to New York, and met Patsy disguised in his character of Slick, by appointment made by telegraph, at Cooney's place in East Houston Street.

The time of their meeting was fixed at eleven o'clock at night, and Patsy, who arrived promptly on the moment, found the Boston crook already awaiting him.

Red Morgan had promised Patsy some time before, while the young detective, in the character of Slick, was in Boston engaged upon the case against the Criminal Trust, that he would propose him for membership in the Order of the Python, which was the thieves' name for this redoubtable organization of criminals of all sorts.

Patsy had at the time agreed to come over to Boston in order to take the first degree in this association, but acting under the advice of Nick Carter, who, remembering that Red had said that it might be taken in New York as well as in Boston, he had sent a letter to the young thief in which he stated that it was impossible for him to visit Boston for the purpose, and he invited Red Morgan to come over to New York and propose him in that branch of the order.

It was to carry out this design that Red Morgan now appeared.

"Hello, Slick!" he exclaimed, as Patsy approached him out of the darkness. "I've been waiting for you more than half an hour."

Patsy looked at his watch.

"I'm exactly on time," he said. "I told you at eleven and I'm here at eleven."

"Well," said Red, "I had nothing else to do. My train got me in at ten o'clock and I came directly here. Now what shall we do for the rest of the night?"

"That's for you to say," retorted Patsy. "If I am to become a member of that society of yours the sooner it is done and over with the better."

"You didn't suppose it could be done to-night, did you?" asked Red, with a grin. "Well, it will be three or four days and mebbe more before I can get you into it and before I can propose you; and first I have got to get

The three numbers of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY preceding this one contain the history of Nick Carter's fight against the Criminal Trust, and it is recommended that they be procured and read, as they contain the preceding experiences of the detective in the character of "Ruddy Mike," as well as Patsy's experiences as "Slick." The numbers are 568, 569 and 570.

permission to do it, and after that your name has to be passed upon by a committee, and then you are called upon and put through a course of examinations. If the committee is satisfied with you, they approve that you go before the society for initiation."

"Don't the full society vote upon my name?" asked Patsy.

"No, but you get what's coming to you when you go up to join."

"I see."

"So there's nothing for us to do to-night, Slick. Can't you suggest something just to keep our hands in?"

Patsy shook his head.

"I haven't got a thing planned out," he said. "I expected all our time would be taken up with this Order of the Python business and I've been laying low and keeping under cover until you came. The fact is, Red, that that organization has got so many guns inside its ranks now that there isn't much use in trying to work outside of it."

"Suppose we go down to Mulvaney's," suggested Red Morgan. "My brother hangs out around there, you know—and by the way I suppose you saw him and took that message to him that I sent?"

"Yes," replied Patsy, "I saw him and took the message; but I haven't seen him since that night; but I haven't been to Mulvaney's either, the fact is, Red, that there was some queer doings there that night, so I have heard."

"What kind of doings?"

"A lot of the bunch were pinched, and I've heard that among them was Black Morgan, your brother."

"Gee! You don't tell me!"

"That's the way I got it."

"Then we'll go down there by all means. I must find out the particulars."

The occasion to which Patsy referred was when Nick Carter had succeeded in inducing Black Morgan to lure nine of the chiefs of the Third Degree of the Criminal Trust to a room on the second floor at Mulvaney's, where he had placed them under arrest and where they had been passed outside through the window to officers, who were waiting there to receive them, and the last one to be arrested and passed through the window had been Black Morgan himself.

But Patsy, although he assisted Nick Carter on that occasion and was in the room with him most of the time, could not be held under any suspicion by the men who frequented Mulvaney's, for the reason that he had left the back saloon and gone upon the street at least an hour before it happened.

He was not known to have returned; in fact, he did not return at all, save through the window into that room on the second floor.

Three days had passed since that time, and Patsy had not returned to Mulvaney's; now he was in some doubt as to how he would be received, since there was no doubt that Ruddy Mike—Nick Carter—would be suspected, and it was generally known that Slick and Ruddy Mike were pals.

However, Patsy had anticipated all this and had prepared himself to undergo an ordeal of questioning that might arise.

As he reasoned the thing out it was hardly supposable that even Ruddy Mike would be suspected for anything other than what he was.

Neither Nick Carter nor Patsy knew exactly what was thought about the circumstances down at Mulvaney's, but viewed from their standpoint the position of affairs was about as follows:

Slick, that is, Patsy, had showed up at the outer saloon early in the night in search of Black Morgan, for whom he had a message to deliver from his brother. Later he had penetrated to the back room, being vouched for by Morgan, and had been seated there in conversation with Black Morgan when Ruddy Mike, otherwise Nick Carter, arrived on the scene.

That was at one o'clock in the morning, and Slick had appeared to be as much surprised as Morgan or anybody by the appearance there of the supposed Ruddy Mike.

He had even, according to previous arrangement with Nick, tried to have a row with him, which row had been narrowly avoided by the intervention of Mulvaney and Morgan, and which had been amicably adjusted.

Later in the experience, Ruddy Mike's entire time and attention had been taken up by Black Morgan, and while that condition existed, Patsy, as Slick, had taken his departure from the place, leaving it altogether as every one must have supposed, save only Nick Carter himself.

All that Mulvaney and his associates could have seen of the succeeding events was that Ruddy Mike and Black Morgan had engaged together in a long whispered consultation, after which Morgan had taken Ruddy Mike from the room, but nobody in the house could have known where, for not even Mulvaney himself was told that they were going to that room on the second floor where so much occurred soon afterward.

Mulvaney had doubtless seen Black Morgan returning to the room time after time until he had repeated it nine times, and with each departure he took away with him one of the nine chiefs of the Third Degree.

Neither Nick nor Patsy knew whether Morgan had taken occasion during any of these nine visits back to the room to reveal to Mulvaney what he was engaged in doing; but the probability was that he had; and if so, all that he could have told to Mulvaney was what Nick Carter had instructed him to do, and that was to take the nine men one by one to the room up-stairs, where, after they had interviewed Ruddy Mike, who was awaiting them with a message from the great chief Pollock, they were to return to their own homes or hangouts.

The only suspicion that could have been aroused in the mind of Mulvaney, therefore, looking at the circumstances calmly and reasonably, was the non-return of Black Morgan himself.

Black had given Mulvaney no indication of any desire to depart from the house, since he had no such intention, and did not himself know that he was going away.

Thinking the thing all out reasonably, neither of the detectives had any doubt that they could return to Mulvaney's without fear, and could easily blot out any accusation or suspicion that might have been raised against them.

Nick and Patsy had discussed every feature of these conditions together carefully, and it was acting upon the advice of the detective that Patsy had gone to keep his engagement with Red Morgan and had determined to go with him to Mulvaney's and to take the first degree of the Order of the Python, as soon as it was possible to do so. The reader will understand something of the enormous risk run by Patsy in doing this, for in the underworld suspicion counts almost as heavily against one as certainty.

"All right, Red," he said to his companion, "we'll go down to Mulvaney's if you like, although it's a little early for that place now."

"If there's nothing else to do we might as well go there," said Red. "I'm likely to meet a lot of guns I know," and so presently they entered together the outer saloon at Mulvaney's Cover.

It was approaching midnight when they arrived there and almost the first person that Patsy saw when he entered the saloon was Mulvaney himself seated in the huge chair over at one end of the bar.

He discovered Slick at the same instant, and he started to his feet with wonderful agility for one of such enormous proportions and hurried across the room to meet him.

"You're the very man I want to see," he exclaimed. "Come in with me to my private office where I can talk to you."

"But I have a friend here that I want to introduce——" began Patsy, when Mulvaney interrupted fiercely:

"Curse your friends!" he said. "I want to talk to you."

Patsy stopped stock-still in his tracks, and retorted as hotly as Mulvaney had spoken.

"No living man can curse my friends; not even the great Mulvaney himself! This man here is Red Morgan, Black Morgan's brother. He's come here to see his brother and we've come to ask for him."

Mulvaney turned quickly to the stranger who had just been introduced to him and demanded:

"Are you Black Morgan's brother?"

"I am," said Red.

"Are you Red Morgan, of Boston?"

"That's me."

"Do you know where your brother is?"

"No, only that he hangs out here."

"Well, he's gone; he's been gone three days. I don't know where he went. He didn't leave any word, and that's the first time since I've known him that he's ever done such a thing."

"Slick, here, tells me that he heard he got pinched," said Red.

"That's what I wanted to ask him about," said Mulvaney; "you can come along with us to my office."

He turned away again, but Patsy remained where he was without moving.

"Hold on," he commanded Mulvaney. "I haven't been hanging around your place long enough to owe you anything, not even my good-will, and I'm not the kind of a gun that let's a man curse my friends and then forgets it while you turn your hand over. If you want to see me in your office you've got to apologize for that remark, or I'll bid you good evening and fight mighty shy of your place hereafter, where I understand a mighty lot of funny things are happening."

Mulvaney had by this time recovered the control of his usually equable temper. Now he smiled blandly upon Slick, and replied:

"Of course I apologize, Slick; I didn't mean it the way you took it at all. I've been worried; worried as the devil over the things that have happened around here lately, and I'll confess to you that when Black Morgan went away in the manner he did it came mighty near doing me up brown."

"All right," said Patsy; "I guess that's sufficient."

"Will you come into the office now?"

"Sure."

"Will you come with us, Red?"

"Sure thing."

Mulvaney led the way through a small door in the side of the room, mounted a narrow flight of stairs to the second floor, where presently he shoved aside a panel, which admitted them to the room which the proprietor of the place designated as his private office.

It was as sumptuously furnished as the private cabinet of a king, and everything was made in proportions to accommodate the immense bulk of Mulvaney.

He motioned his two companions to seat themselves as they chose, placed a bottle and some glasses and a box of cigars on the table between them, and began at once on the subject that was uppermost in his mind.

"Slick," he said, "there has been a good deal of talk among the men who come here about the things that have been happening of late, and I might as well tell you to start off with, that we aren't at all satisfied about you and that pal of yours, Ruddy Mike."

"Why not?" asked Patsy.

"Well, there are a good many reasons and very good ones, too, if you stop to think of it."

"I don't see any reason at all for casting suspicion upon Ruddy Mike and me."

"I don't know that I do either, Slick, but I'm going to state the facts just as they exist, and do it mighty plain, for I tell you right now that if you should go into the back room to-night, as I suppose you intend to do, unprepared for what was to come, you'd have as many as twenty rows on hand in that many seconds."

"Well, if they only come one at a time I think I could take care of them," was the calm reply.

"That isn't the point."

"What is the point?"

"It is that I want you to set yourself straight with me first here in this room before you leave it. If you can do that; if you can convince me that everything is all right, I'll pass the word along that it is, and that will settle the business, but if you can't it is likely to go pretty hard with you before the night is over!"

CHAPTER II.

MULVANEY, THE CRIMINAL BOSS.

"Do you mean to tell me," asked Patsy, "that I am suspected?"

"That's what."

"What am I suspected of?"

"Nothing in particular and everything in general."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean just what I say."

"Well, if you want me to set myself straight with you, you've got to tell me what I'm suspected of. I don't know what you're talking about."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Mulvaney, "I'll put you through a straight course of sprouts in the way of asking questions. I'll do it in the way the fellows up there would do it, but I want you to promise at the start that you won't get on your ear and get huffy and think I'm insulting you when I ain't."

"All right, Mul, go ahead."

"As far as I'm concerned, Slick, I'm up in the air. I don't show any favors in this place and I'm willing to admit that I like you and you'd have just as fair play as Black Morgan himself; any of the boys that know me will tell you that."

"I don't doubt it, Mul. Go ahead with your questions; I won't get huffy."

"Well, in the first place, who is this Ruddy Mike?"

"He's an old pal of mine," said Patsy.

"Have you known him long?"

"Ever since I was a boy."

"Have you always known him to be square?"

"I've always known him to be the squarest man I ever knew."

"Where does he come from?"

"I think he was born in New York, and he's lived here most of his life."

"What's his right name?"

"I don't think he'd want me to tell that, and I'm not going to do it."

"Was that straight goods he told me about being sent to Auburn prison, and from there to Dannemora, and retransferred again to Sing Sing, and then escaping as he did?"

"That's all straight goods."

"How do you know; you weren't there?"

"No; but he said so, and that's enough for me."

"Slick, if you were pinched to-night for some old thing that's past and gone, and somebody told you that Ruddy Mike gave you the double-cross, and showed pretty good proof that he had, would you believe it?"

"No," said Patsy; "I would not."

"Have you already forgotten that you almost had a row with him the night you met here after a long separation?"

"No, I haven't forgotten it, and that's just the reason I answered you as I did."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean this, Mul: I've gone around suspecting Ruddy for a long time doing what I charged him with that night. Come to find out, instead of going back on me, as I believed he had, he's been doing me a favor all the time. That taught me a lesson, Mul, and the next man who talks to me about Ruddy Mike is going to get a back-hander from me and don't you forget it."

"All right, Slick, we'll leave that part for the present; now, another thing."

"Well?"

"Do you happen to know whether Ruddy Mike is a member of the Order of the Python or not?"

"If he's ever joined it I didn't know it."

"Has he never told you that he had?"

"No."

"Do you know that he pretended that night when he was here, that night when the nine chiefs were called out to be interviewed by him, that he belonged to the order?"

"I wasn't here, Mul, and you know it."

"That isn't an answer to my question."

"It is an answer; anyhow it's the only answer you'll get. I wasn't here and I don't know anything about it."

"Well, then, for your information, I'll tell you this: He did pretend that he was a member of the order; he did succeed in making Black Morgan think so, whether it was true or not. Not only that, but he represented himself as being high up in the order and an active member of the Third Degree."

"Well, what of it? That hasn't got anything to do with me, and, moreover, Mul, I don't know why you talk to me like this, for I'm not a member of the order and haven't pretended to be."

"I know that."

"Well, then, what are you talking to me about it for?"

"I wanted to find out if you knew whether he was or not."

"Well, you've got your answer."

"I'll go ahead then; he did pretend that he was a member of the Order of the Python, and he did succeed in convincing more than one of them that it was so, for Morgan told me of it. Black took him to a room on the second floor, where he took, one after another, nine chiefs of the Third Degree, who were here that night; each one of them was taken to that room separately, and not one of them reappeared. After the ninth one had been taken there, Morgan came back and told me that in fifteen minutes he himself was going to be interviewed, and he never returned. More than that, I haven't seen or heard of Ruddy Mike since that night."

"Well, what about it?" asked Patsy.

"The thing about it is that I want an explanation of it, if you can give me one."

"How in the world can I give you one when I wasn't here, and didn't know anything about it?"

"I don't know. Have you seen Ruddy Mike since that night?"

"I have."

"When?"

"I saw him to-day."

"Where?"

"In a house up-town."

"What house?"

"I'm not going to tell you that."

"What was he doing when you saw him?"

"He was making plans for a scheme that he wants to carry out, and he was asking me to help him."

"What kind of a graft was it?"

"That's Ruddy Mike's business, and you'll have to ask him."

"What time was it when you saw him?"

"About three o'clock this afternoon."

"Do you think he's likely to show up here before long?"

"I think you're likely to see him most any minute."

"Well, if he comes here to-night he'll be up against it hard, and don't you forget it."

"That won't faze him any, if he is."

"Now, Slick, are you on the square yourself?"

"That's my game. I always try to be."

"And you never go back on a pal?"

"Never once."

"You asked me a little while ago what the suspicion against you was, and I didn't tell you. Now I will tell you."

"I wish you would."

"There is a pretty general idea gotten into the minds of the men who come here that Ruddy Mike is none other than Nick Carter in disguise, and that you, who pretended to know him so well, are one of his assistants, and I might as well tell you right now that while I don't personally believe that myself, it's got into the heads of the boys, so that they intend to make you both prove who you are the very first chance they get."

"I don't know how I'm going to prove who I am any more than I have," said Patsy.

"Well, if you go from this office into the back room, you'll mighty quick find out."

"Isn't it about time that we went there?"

"When the time comes to go you better let me do it first." Mulvaney turned then to Red and asked abruptly:

"How long have you known Slick?"

"Oh, eight or ten years," replied Red Morgan, lying so easily and so readily that Patsy had difficulty to repress a smile; and the lie showed that, notwithstanding the suspicions that had been aroused against Slick at Mulvaney's, Red still had entire confidence in him and was ready to fight his battles at any moment.

The answer given so quickly and so easily had its effect upon Mulvaney for the man who made it was undoubtedly Red Morgan, and being the brother of Mulvaney's favorite, was therefore worthy of all confidence. It must be understood that had Red Morgan entertained the least suspicion of the real identity of the man he was defending, he would have been the very first one to jump at his throat and the very last one to confer a favor upon him.

But he had no such suspicions, and the really short acquaintance that he had had with Slick had confirmed him in the belief that the latter was all right, and was as great a criminal as he himself.

Even Mulvaney himself was not prepared for the full effects which the whisper of suspicion had produced upon the men, as shown when, just before two o'clock in the morning, the three entered the back room of Mulvaney's Cover.

There was not a man there who had not heard of the arrival of Slick at the Cover, and who had not been informed that Mulvaney had taken him to his private office for a personal interview. They were thus prepared for his coming, and it seemed almost as if to a man they were seated with their eyes upon the door when Patsy passed through it into the room.

And there was a sullen silence among them, as if in this expectation they had been becoming momentarily more morose and more determined to make Slick account for some things that they didn't know, and which their suspicious natures made them believe he could tell them.

As they passed into the room Mulvaney stepped out in advance to the center of it. He took his ponderous position there and raised his right hand as if about to speak, when one of the men arose and interrupted before the speech began, saying:

"Hold on, just a minute, Mr. Mulvaney, before you begin. We come pretty near knowing what you're going to say, and I've been appointed spokesman to say that there isn't any need of saying anything. We've got Slick here in this room where we want him and we propose to do with him pretty near as we please, no matter who objects; it's only fair, Mulvaney, that you must know from the start that you haven't got any say in this affair. We've taken it out of your hands."

Mulvaney flushed with anger.

What he might have said in reply to this frank statement will never be recorded, for at that moment Patsy thrust himself forward in front of him and exclaimed, addressing the man who had spoken:

"I'm Slick, and I'm here to answer for myself. As for doing with me as it pleases you, I think you'll find that I've got something to say about that myself if you try to go too far; and I'll say this before you begin."

"Say on," said the man. "We're here to listen to all you have to tell us."

"Well, then, in the first place," continued Patsy, "if there was any real reason for the suspicions that you fellows have been fools enough to concoct, it isn't at all likely that I'd be here to-night as I am. It would have been much easier for me to fight shy of this place if I'd wanted to, and if I'd had any disguise on I'd only had to take it off to escape you fellows and all who believe as you do.

"When I arrived here to-night I came with this man who entered the room with me; I'll introduce him now, and you can shake hands with him now or later on, as you please.

"He's Red Morgan, and own brother to the Black Morgan you all know; and I guess when I get through saying my say, he'll have a word or two to offer for me.

"When I got here, before I had a chance even to introduce Red to Mulvaney, Mul toted me out to his private office to tell me all about what you fellows have been thinking, and we've talked it over pretty thoroughly. He's asked me a thousand questions about Ruddy and about myself, and he's talked a whole lot about something that I know very little of, namely, that Order of the Python.

"Now, before you ask any questions, I want to apprise you of something. That night when I was here last, I went out of the room and out of the house and into the street, according to Mul's reckoning of time, almost an hour before anything happened that you can conveniently explain, and that I did not come back in here, among you, you all know.

"As for Ruddy Mike, I've known him pretty nearly all my life, and I'll speak for him the same as I would for myself.

"Now go ahead with your funeral, and if I'm to be the corpse at the performance, I'll tell you right now I won't be the only one present."

It was evident that Patsy had made a good impression by this speech, for there were murmurs of approval from every side as he stepped back again and took up a position beside Red Morgan.

Red Morgan took the initiative and stepped forward. For a moment he stood there silently, with his arms folded across his chest, reminding some one in the room of his brother, Black Morgan, save that he was younger and that his hair was exceedingly red.

Presently he raised his hand and gestured vehemently with it through his short speech, and he said:

"I don't know you guns, any of you, and after what I've seen and heard to-night, I don't know as I want to, but I do know Slick. You fellows don't know me, and from what I've seen and heard it's just as well for some of you that you don't, but you know me by reputation and you know my brother, and you know that what I say pretty near goes.

"I want to tell you right now that Slick here and I have been pals for a long time; we've done business together, and he's done his part of it to the queen's taste, and once when we come pretty near being pinched it was Slick that pulled me out of trouble, and he saved me from a whole lot more than he knew anything about, too.

"When a man does that, I side with him. I told Mulvaney to-night that I had known Slick eight or ten years; I don't know that that's exactly true, but it's true enough to suit me, and I've known him long enough for the present purposes, too.

"I've got just one more word in conclusion, and that is to back up what Slick said to you in his remarks, and you can put that in your pipes and smoke it!"

CHAPTER III.

THE BEGINNING OF A TRAGEDY.

There was no doubt about the effect this plain statement made by Red Morgan had upon those present. They cast uneasy glances toward one another, and some of them lifted their eyebrows in a questioning way, but there was not one among them who altered his sullen looks in the least, and it was quite evident that they had become so thoroughly imbued with the suspicions that had been aroused and fostered, that nothing that could be said or done would change their attitude in the least toward Patsy.

It was evident, too, that during the time while Patsy was closeted with Mulvaney, these men had prepared themselves thoroughly for what was to come after, for now they went ahead with a precision of detail which showed that everything had already been mapped out completely, and that the men had been appointed who were to conduct the proceedings.

The man who had spoken first, and who had, in fact,

announced himself as spokesman for the crowd, now stepped forward and took the floor again.

"Red Morgan," he said, "as you say, we don't know you, and in reply to the other things you said, if you don't like our style you're welcome to go whenever it pleases you, because this ain't any of your fun. As for you, Slick, it's been settled that you've got to undergo a regular trial, and we've arranged just how its going to be conducted. We're hoping that you'll take it all in a peaceful way, and make as little trouble as possible, for we assure you it will be conducted on the square; that you'll be given your full say and that no unfair advantage will be taken of you.

"But you may as well make up your mind now, once and for all, that you've got to be tried, and that you've got to abide by the conditions that have been settled upon after that trial, and that you've got to take whatever medicine we vote to give you.

"There's a room up-stairs that's got some chairs and a platform in one end of it. It's used for other purposes generally, but just now it happens to be vacant and we'll adjourn there for the trial. If you'll kindly step forward, I'll take you by one arm and one of my friends here will take you by the other, and we'll conduct you there, after which the proceedings will begin."

"Suppose I should refuse?" asked Patsy, smiling.

"In that case you'd be taken there whether you wanted to go or not."

"Suppose I should put up a fight about it?"

"In that case you'd be taken there just the same, but it's most likely you'd be a corpse when you got there."

"What's your name?" asked Patsy. "I don't think I ever saw you before."

"I'm called Peters generally, although there are several other names that I lay claim to on occasion."

"Are you the boss of this outfit that's going to try me?"

"I've been appointed marshal of the proceedings, and what I say goes as you'll find out presently."

Patsy saw plainly that there was no help for it. He realized, too, he was in a predicament that in the end would prove more than likely to be a serious one.

He understood at least that these men were in deadly earnest in their charges against him, and knowing, as he did, that they were right and that their suspicions were true after all, although they did not suspect why they were true, he saw that his life could be saved now only by a very narrow margin indeed, and that if he did come out of this experience unscathed, it would be due only to his own wit, his presence of mind, his coolness, and his determination of spirit.

If any of these men should get at the exact truth; if ever they should discover who he really was, then there could be no hope for him whatever, for they would take his life as quickly as they would crush a spider or slap a mosquito that tried to sting them.

He turned one glance upon Red Morgan, and saw him scowling and gritting his teeth as if he were preparing to put up a fight for it whether Slick wished to do so or not; and he reached out a hand and rested it upon the young criminal's shoulder and said to him:

"None of that, Red, old chap. It will be time enough to grit your teeth and double your fists when I say fight, but I do want you to come with me and stay by me and see the thing through."

"That I will, you bet your life," was Red Morgan's quick response.

It was at this moment, if any, during all this experience, when Patsy really regretted the part he was playing, for he liked the attitude that Red Morgan assumed, and he could not deny to himself that he liked the young man also, notwithstanding the fact that he was a criminal.

But there are criminals and criminals, and Red Morgan had many points of a better man if only they had been nurtured and cherished. That he had gone wrong and fallen into crooked ways was, perhaps, not entirely his own fault, and for the instant it hurt Patsy to think that he was also deceiving this man who was in turn so true to him.

Mentally he resolved that he would somehow make amends for it in the future, and that he did so we shall some time see.

Patsy now stepped quickly forward to where Peters stood and permitted the latter to seize him by the arm. Then another of the men stepped forward and grasped his other arm.

Red Morgan, with Mulvaney, fell in directly behind them, and so the procession began marching, two by two, and so passing out of the great room which was back of the saloon and along the corridor which led to the stairs.

Patsy knew where they were going, for he had heard Nick Carter describe the place. He had known when Peters mentioned the vacant room up-stairs that was sometimes used by others he referred to the meeting-place of the Third Degree of the Order of the Python.

Nick Carter had visited that room on two separate occasions.

On the first one he went there with a man called Cranky, and had found the domino uniforms which the men of the order wore during their meetings.

On the second occasion he had gone there by working his way according to the ritual of the Python, past the guarded doors, and so presently into the meeting-room, concealed as he was by the domino and hood that he wore.

All of this he had described to Patsy; and so the latter knew perfectly well to what place he was being taken, just as he also knew that whatever sentence would be passed upon him by these men who were to try him

would be carried out not only in the spirit, but in the letter, without compunction and without compassion, and that absolutely no mercy would be shown him once he were convicted of the charge that had been made against him.

They presently found themselves in a large, almost square, room, with a large, boxlike arrangement in the center—the receptacle from which Nick Carter had taken the domino uniforms—while around the wall there were ranged twenty-seven chairs.

At one end of the room there was a raised platform upon which was a boxed-in altarlike arrangement, with a roomy chair beside it and a gavel resting on the top of it.

One of the chairs was taken from the side of the room and lifted upon the square box in the center, and then the two men who were on either side of Patsy lifted him suddenly from the floor and raised him upon the box, where he was told to seat himself in the chair that had been placed there for him.

The man Peters then strode solemnly to the end of the room, mounted the platform, and took the chair beside the altar.

The others who had come there to attend the trial and to participate in it occupied the chairs, as far as they would go around, and the others, for there were more than fifty of them altogether, stood leaning against the walls around the room, in various attitudes of expectancy.

"The jury will now be selected by lot," said Peters, and from a place underneath the altar beside which he was seated he drew a ballot-box, the drawer of which was provided with a plentiful number of balls, the majority of them being white, while six of them only were black.

"This jury," announced Peters, "will be composed of six men, instead of twelve, for I take it that six of us can decide the fate of this defendant quite as well and as justly as twelve of us could.

"The prisoner will be permitted to blindfold my eyes, after which Scotty will call off the names of those present here, and as Scotty calls each name I will draw a ball from this box; if it be a white ball that I draw, the man whose name has been called will resume his place beside the wall, or in a chair, as the case may be; if the ball I draw be a black one, the man whose name is called for that draw will step up here to the altar, and face the room till the six of the members of the jury are drawn, after which they may occupy six of those chairs arranged here in front of the altar, and they shall decide the fate of the prisoner as they see fit. If that is agreeable to all of you, we'll proceed."

There was no dissenting voice, and, after a moment's wait, Peters, handkerchief in hand, stepped down from the altar and crossed to the boxlike elevation upon which Patsy was seated. Then he directed Patsy to blindfold his eyes so that it would be impossible for him to see, in order that there might be no chance for any favor to be shown.

As soon as this was done, the box was placed in his hand, and then Scotty began to call the roll of the men present, announcing that he would begin with himself first.

The scene might have been a ludicrous one had less depended upon it, but as it was it was fraught with all the dramatic power and force of a real criminal trial.

But Scotty had barely mentioned his own name and a white ball announced as his luck in the proceeding, when Red Morgan leaped from the chair he had been occupying and exclaimed:

"One moment, Peters, if you please."

"Well, what's the matter with you?" demanded Peters.

"I only want it to be understood that I am one of the men present, and that I want my name called for that jury the same as the others."

Peters laughed aloud at this demand, and replied sneeringly:

"We might as well free the prisoner at once, for if all the others were for convicting him, you'd be for acquittal; that would be a disagreement, at the most. Now, Mr. Red Morgan, we'll permit you to act as counsel for the defendant, if you wish; and the sentiments of this committee is that you are disqualified for acting on this jury."

"But I protest——" began Red Morgan once more, when Peters interrupted him.

"Look here, Morgan," he began savagely. "There isn't a man present that's got anything against you, and I want to tell you right now that, unless you shut that trap of yours, we'll place you under arrest and fire you out of the room. Now, will you submit to the voice of the majority?"

"I suppose I'll have to," assented Morgan sullenly; "but I take advantage of your permission to act as counsel for my pal here."

"All right; we've no objection to that."

The drawing of jurors continued thereafter until the sixth man was announced, when the bandage was taken from Peters' eyes, and he resumed his place on the platform.

"Now, my friend," he said, "I believe I am disposed to be as fair as anybody could be at this trial, and if there is no objection raised by the prisoner's counsel, I'll act in the capacity of presiding judge."

"Your Honor," said Red Morgan, stepping forward, "as counsel for the prisoner and in behalf of the defense, I wish to say that your statement is accepted in that you are and will be as fairly disposed toward the prisoner as any man here. I believe, from what I have seen of you, that it is your idea to be just and entirely so, notwith-

standing the prejudices you are known to feel against the defendant in this case. We accept the suggestion of your own that you act as presiding judge."

All of this would have been exceedingly laughable to an outsider peering in upon the scene, ignorant of the real questions at issue; but those present found nothing ludicrous in it.

To them, and especially to the prisoner and the prisoner's counsel, it was a tragedy, indeed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST ACT OF THE TRAGEDY.

The beginning of the proceedings was the selection of counsel for the prosecution, and the man Scotty was finally selected for that responsible position. In accepting it, he announced as follows:

"If your honor pleases, and the gentlemen of the jury, before I entered upon the practise of the profession upon which I have lately been engaged I was an attorney at law. I make this statement in order that you may understand that I will exert myself to the utmost to carry on my end of the proceedings with absolute faithfulness; in the meantime, however, announcing to the counsel for the defense that I shall unhesitatingly take advantage of every opportunity that is offered for me to do so.

"In presenting this case to your consideration I have to announce that the prisoner at the bar, known to us as Slick, alias a good many other titles which are unnecessary to-day, has been charged with and an indictment has been duly found against him for the crime of treason.

"It has been charged, and we believe correctly, that he has conspired with others against the existence of an organization to which we are all, with the exception of himself, members. It was only four days ago, or, to be more correct, a little over three days ago, when this man Slick first appeared among us here. He was not then and is not now a member of the organization to which I have referred.

"When he appeared he brought with him, or, at least, it was announced that he did so, a message for our friend and brother, Black Morgan, from his own blood brother, Red Morgan, who is here in this room.

"Black Morgan, having heard the message reported to be from his brother, vouched for the man Slick to the extent of admitting him to the back room of Mulvaney's Cover, where we're in the habit of congregating, and where no man is permitted to enter unless he is vouched for duly under the regulations and requirements that we recognize.

"While this man Slick was in that room another man, Ruddy Mike, by name, made his appearance there, and it was at once apparent that these two men were well known to each other, and neither of them hesitated to state and to assert that they were old-time pals.

"That same night, through the machinations of Ruddy Mike, as will appear later——"

"I object!" shouted Red Morgan, leaping forward and shaking his hand in the air before the judge. "If your honor pleases," he proceeded, "the man who is called Ruddy Mike is not present in this room. He is not, and cannot be, as I understand it, produced as a witness here. I object to any testimony being offered in the opening of counsel in this case unless he can assure us that it will be substantiated by evidence later on in the proceedings."

"Your honor," said Scotty, "all that I have said thus far will be substantiated by evidence. It's true that Ruddy Mike is not present, and that we are not able to produce him."

"Then I submit," exclaimed Red, "that such testimony would be only secondary evidence, and that I shall object to its introduction here."

"Proceed with your opening, Scotty," ordered the self-appointed judge; and Scotty continued:

"This man Ruddy Mike may or may not be a member of our organization. I have been told on good authority that he was not; we have already been told, on the same good authority, that he convinced Black Morgan that he was a member of it.

"We know that that same night Ruddy Mike called out the nine chiefs of the third degree who assembled here—called them out one by one, to a room on the second floor—for the stated purpose of interviewing them separately, and we know that from that moment—from the moment when each of them departed from that room to go to the room on the second floor—not one of them has been seen. Not one of them has been heard from, and their fate remains a mystery to us.

"I will go back still further. Some time before that occurrence there were other mysterious disappearances here. They have had some bearing upon this case, and I refer now to our head chief, James Pollock, who was called away in the same manner, and whose fate still remains a mystery. It was to determine his fate that the nine chiefs met together that night.

"Now, gentlemen of the jury, there is only circumstantial evidence against this defendant here, but the circumstances do point to a conspiracy between him and the police of this city to break up this organization of ours, and to arrest and convict its organizers and chiefs. You know, and, therefore, I need not tell you what the penalty is for such an offense, and if we find this man Slick guilty of it, I shall demand of you, gentlemen, a verdict which will permit us to exercise our full authority in such cases made and provided."

Again Red Morgan leaped to his feet and shook his hand in the air.

"I submit, your honor," he exclaimed, "that the counsel for the prosecution is making out no case at all

against my client. He has stated the existence of a conspiracy between a man who we don't know and the police of New York, and the only accusation he has made which reflects at all upon my client is that he had once been pals with Ruddy Mike.

"Ruddy Mike is not on trial here. Slick is the man who is on trial, and I submit again that if that is the only accusation that the attorney for the prosecution states in his opening, I have a right to demand and to expect that the indictment be quashed forthwith."

"The indictment will stand, all right," said Peters, from the improvised bench. "Proceed, Scotty."

"I will offer testimony here to prove," continued Scotty, "that during the night of four days ago the man Slick pretended to leave the building for good; that he did not get away, but remained outside the building, and was seen half an hour later, in consultation with a policeman on a corner."

Here was a telling blow to the prosecution, and the announcement of something that Patsy had not suspected, and certainly that Red Morgan had not anticipated.

Red turned an inquiring glance toward his client, and Patsy shook his head negatively, meaning thereby that he had not suspected such a statement, but, nevertheless, gave Red the impression that the statement was absolutely untrue.

It was damaging testimony, as Patsy well knew, if it could be proved.

"I submit," continued Scotty, "that if it is true that Slick was seen in consultation with a policeman outside this building half an hour after he left it, that it is prima facie evidence of his participation in the conspiracy that I have outlined, and I submit, further, that it suggests, as I shall endeavor to prove, that he left this building with the intention of so consulting with the policeman, and at the volition and acting upon the request of the man Ruddy Mike."

He paused a moment, and looked exultingly around the room from face to face, as if in search of approval of what he had said, and he found it expressed in every pair of eyes that was turned in his direction.

"I shall prove," Scotty went on again, "that some time within an hour after Slick was known to have disappeared from this building, a man whose description is not perfectly given, but whose description in particular accords with that of Slick, applied at the fire department headquarters, around the corner in the second street from here, for a ladder, and obtained it."

Patsy smiled at this.

He recollected perfectly the circumstances of obtaining that ladder.

He did not go after it himself, but sent one of the uniformed policemen to get it, and it was evident to him that this statement on the part of Scotty was a bare-faced effort to connect him with the procurement of the ladder, for he well knew if they had any description of the man who had obtained it, it would be that of a policeman in uniform.

"Now, if your honor pleases," continued Scotty, "I have stated an outline of about all the case I have to offer against this man, but I contend that if I succeed in establishing what I have outlined, I will have sufficient evidence to convict him of participation in such conspiracy as I have named, and I shall demand that he be sentenced to the full penalty for such offense. I will now call Spots to the witness-chair."

"Give the jury your name," ordered Scotty, as soon as the witness had taken his seat.

"Spots will do all right," he replied.

"Where were you during the night of the disappearance of the nine chiefs of the third degree?"

"I was in the back room at Mulvaney's Cover."

"Did you see the defendant there?"

"I did."

"Who was with him when he came into the room?"

"He came into the room with Black Morgan."

"What happened then after he entered the room?"

"Black Morgan introduced him to the rest of us as Slick, a gun from Boston, who had brought a message to him from his brother, Red Morgan, and he said that he would vouch for him."

"How long did he remain in that room that night?"

"I don't remember exactly, but I should say it was about three o'clock when he went out of it."

"Did you see him when he went out?"

"I did."

"Was he alone?"

"Yes."

"Do you know why he went out?"

"I didn't, but I thought——"

Red Morgan leaped to his feet.

"It doesn't make any difference what you thought. Your honor, please, I object to what the witness thought. What he saw and what he knows is available evidence in this case."

"Do you know why Slick left the room?" asked Judge Peters of the witness.

"I do not."

"I'll approach the question from another point," announced Scotty. "What was the defendant doing a few moments before he left the room?"

"He was whispering with Ruddy Mike."

"Could you hear anything of what they were saying to each other?"

"I could not."

"How long was it after you saw the two men whispering together before Slick went out of the room?"

"Mebbe it was ten minutes; perhaps it was not so much."

"What was Slick's manner of going out?"

"Well, he sort of slunk out, I thought."

"I object again to what the witness thought," exclaimed Red.

"Anyhow, he slunk out, all right," exclaimed the witness angrily.

"What do you mean by that word 'slunk'?" demanded Scotty.

"I mean that his manner was such that it indicated to me that he did not wish it to be noticed that he was going away."

"Did you see him again that night?"

"I did not."

"What was the conduct of Ruddy Mike after the departure of Slick from the room?"

"I object," retorted Red Morgan. "The conduct of Ruddy Mike has nothing to do with this case. We are trying the defendant, not Ruddy Mike."

"If your honor please," said Scotty, "I intend to prove beyond the question of a doubt the connection between Ruddy Mike and the defendant before I have finished this case."

"Then prove it first, and ask your questions afterward," retorted Red Morgan.

"I think," said Peters, "that I will be obliged to sustain the objection. Counsel may proceed."

"Spots, what do you remember about the disappearance of the nine chiefs that night?"

"All that I remember about it is that they did disappear."

"Can you describe the manner of it to this jury?"

"Well, the manner of it was about this; if that bloke from Boston will let me tell it."

"I haven't the slightest objection to your telling it," said Red.

"Proceed," ordered Scotty.

"The men, Ruddy Mike and Black Morgan, withdrew into a corner of the room, and spent about half an hour whispering together; then they left the room together, and by and by Black Morgan returned to it."

"What did he do when he came back?"

"He went directly to one of the chiefs, and held a whispered conversation with him, and from there he passed to another one, and did the same thing, and he repeated it again and again, until he had visited all nine of them and whispered with them."

"What happened then?" asked Scotty.

"Then Black Morgan returned to the first man he'd whispered to, and they left the room together."

"Well, what next?"

"They had been gone about fifteen or twenty minutes, perhaps less, when Black Morgan returned alone."

"Let us understand this perfectly. You say he returned alone, unaccompanied by the chief he had taken out of the room with him about fifteen minutes before that time, or about half an hour after he had gone out of the room in the company of Ruddy Mike?"

"That's the idea."

"What next?"

"The next thing was that Black Morgan went over to the chief he had whispered to secondly, and took him out of the room with him, the same as he had done with the first one."

"Go on; what next?"

"He was gone again about the same length of time that he was before."

"That is, about fifteen or twenty minutes?"

"Yes."

"Did he return alone the next time?"

"He did."

"So that, up to that time, he had taken two of the chiefs out of the room and returned alone each time?"

"Yes."

"Go on. What next?"

"He took the third chief he had whispered to."

"And was the same performance repeated again?"

"It was."

"That is, he was gone fifteen or twenty minutes, and returned alone?"

"Yes."

"And was it repeated again?"

"It was repeated over and over, until all the nine chiefs had gone from the room as I have described, without any of them having returned to it."

"I think we understand that now, Spots."

"Did Black Morgan return to the room again after he had taken the ninth chief out?"

"He did."

"He returned alone?"

"Yes."

"What did he do then?"

"He went over and spent a long time whispering with Mulvaney."

CHAPTER V.

THE SECOND ACT OF THE TRAGEDY.

"Did you have an opportunity to hear what Black Morgan and Mulvaney were whispering about?" Scotty continued, addressing the witness.

"I didn't; only they seemed to me to be very much interested."

"How long did he continue——"

"Did who continue?" exclaimed Red Morgan.

"How long did Black Morgan continue whispering with Mulvaney?"

"Oh, about fifteen minutes, I should think."

"What did he do then?"

"He looked at his watch, jumped to his feet, and rushed out of the room, as though the devil was after him."

"Do you know where he went?"

"I don't, but I suppose——"

"You are not here to suppose," said Red Morgan.

"You may state what you supposed in this instance," said Peters, from the bench.

"Well," said Spots, "I supposed that he went to the place where he had taken the nine chiefs."

"Did Black Morgan return again to the back room after that?" asked Scotty.

"He did not."

"You mean, do you not," said Red Morgan, "that you didn't see him return?"

"I mean just what I said," insisted Scotty; "that he didn't return. I remained there till daylight myself, and if he had returned I would have known it."

"Proceed," said Peters.

"Was any surprise expressed or any uneasiness manifested by those who remained in the room because of the proceedings as you describe them?" asked Scotty.

"I didn't notice anything."

"Did you feel any yourself?"

"Not at that time."

"But you did feel surprise and uneasiness later on?"

"Yes; the next day, when I knew about it."

"When you knew about what?"

"When I knew that the whole bunch had disappeared."

"Why were you uneasy?"

"Because I began to suspect that Slick and Ruddy Mike were not all that they professed to be, and, because——"

"Hold on, there!" shouted Red Morgan.

"Strike that out," ordered the judge; "at least, I mean we will not consider that. We have no court stenographer here, so it cannot be stricken out, but the gentlemen of the jury will note that they are not to consider the witness' last statement."

"The defense may have the witness," said Scotty, and Red Morgan jumped to his feet.

"What kind of a gun are you?" he demanded of the witness.

"I'm a cracksman, if you want to know it, and as good a one as any of you."

"You got any grudge against Slick?"

"No, I haven't."

"Have you got any grudge against the man called Ruddy Mike?"

"No."

"Did you ever have any suspicions against either of them before to-night?"

"Yes, I did."

"When?"

"Oh, a couple of days ago, when we talked it over."

"When who talked it over?"

"The bunch of us down below in the back room."

"What did you talk over?"

"The disappearances."

"Was it you or somebody else who first suggested that this defendant, Slick, might know something about it?"

"I don't remember."

"Did you entertain any suspicions of the kind before it was suggested to you?"

"I don't think I did."

"And you don't remember who made the suggestion?"

"No."

"Did you know that you were going to be a witness here to-night?"

"I didn't any more than I supposed we would all be witnesses when I heard there was going to be a trial."

"Isn't it a fact, Spots, that your suspicions at this moment are more against Ruddy Mike than against this defendant?"

"Yes, it is."

"Isn't it a fact that when you ask your own self the question that you really don't harbor any suspicion against this defendant at all?"

"No; it is not exactly the fact, for I do harbor them."

"Isn't it a fact that the only suspicions you feel against him arise by your knowledge that he was formerly a pal of Ruddy Mike?"

"I suppose it is."

"Do you know anything more than you have already stated against the integrity—as we recognize that word—of this person?"

"I do not."

"That is all; you may step down."

"Chris Conroy," called Scotty, and a big, black-haired Irishman took the witness-chair.

"Conroy," said Scotty, "where were you at or near the hour of three o'clock in the morning of the time we are talking about here?"

"I was walking along through the street, toward this place, about a block away from it."

"Did you see anybody while you were approaching this place at that time?"

"I did."

"Anybody that you recognized?"

"Yes."

"Who was it that you recognized?"

"The copper on this beat."

"Where did you see him?"

"He was standing in a doorway, talking with a man who I thought to be a gun; anyhow, he was in citizen's clothes."

"Did you recognize the man he was talking to?"

"I did not."

"Had you ever seen him before?"

"I had not."

"Have you ever seen him since?"

"I have."

"When and where?"

"To-night, in the back room down-stairs, and at the present moment in this room."

"You say he is in this room at the present moment?"

"Yes."

"The same man to whom the policeman was talking when he stood in the doorway where you passed him while you were on your way here on the night in question?"

"Yes."

"Are you positive about the identification of that man?"

"I am."

"Point him out to the jury."

"He sits there on that box in the middle of the room, and is the defendant in this case," said Conroy, pointing his forefinger directly at Patsy.

Here was damaging testimony, indeed, and given in a legal way and after a legal form that could not be denied.

"When you saw the policeman and the man talking together in the doorway," continued Scotty, "how did the sight impress you?"

"It didn't impress me at all. I merely noticed it, that was all."

"You didn't at the time, then, regard it as anything extraordinary?"

"I did not."

"You looked upon it merely as a policeman on his beat engaging in ordinary conversation with a man he had encountered?"

"Yes."

"When did the incident first strike you as having been extraordinary?"

"When I heard about what had occurred here that night."

"You refer now to the disappearances?"

"Yes."

"Why did the recollection of that incident then strike you as extraordinary?"

"Because it struck me that the man I had seen in citizen's clothes might have been a fly-cop, who was making arrangements with the policeman in uniform for the capture that was afterward made."

"Did you express your belief to others?"

"I did."

"What was said to you about it?"

"Somebody said—I don't remember who—that it might have been Slick who was talking with the copper."

"Why was that remark made that it might have been Slick?"

"It was made because I gave as good a description as I could of the man I had seen."

"And the man to whom you were talking thought he recognized Slick in that description?"

"Yes."

"The witness is yours," said Scotty to Red Morgan.

Red Morgan rose slowly from his chair this time, and stepped down until he was within a few feet of the witness, and stood so that he faced him exactly.

"Your name is Conroy, I believe?" he began.

"Yes."

"You possess an extraordinary recollection, do you not, for faces you have once seen?"

"I think I do."

"And you are capable of carrying in your recollection descriptions of persons whom you may have encountered by chance on the street?"

"Oh, I guess so."

"Was that night, when you saw Slick in conversation with a policeman, a particularly dark one?"

"I don't think it was."

"Where did you see them standing when you saw them together?"

"In a doorway."

"What kind of a doorway?"

"Oh, just an ordinary doorway."

"Were they drawn back within it?"

"Partly so."

"And yet you contend you were able to see the man in citizen's clothes so distinctly that you were not only able to recognize him when you saw him again, but you could also give a perfect description of the manner in which he was dressed."

"Yes, I do."

"Did you pass them on the same side of the street where they were talking?"

"I did."

"Did you see them before you were close to them, or only when you were quite near to them?"

"I didn't see them at all until I was close up to them. If I had, I would have crossed to the other side of the street, because it isn't any part of my business to come any closer to the coppers than I have to."

"Did you ever see me before, Conroy?"

"I don't think I ever did."

"Were you ever in Boston?"

"I've been there a good many times."

"Were you in Boston about four weeks ago?"

"What's that to you, anyhow?"

"Answer my question, and you'll find out."

"Answer whatever he asks you," ordered Peters.

"Were you in Boston about four weeks ago?" repeated Red.

"I was."

"Were you in Reardon's place in Chinatown, in Boston, one night while you were there about four weeks ago?"

"I was."

"Don't you remember now that you saw me there at that time, and talked with me?"

"I do now; yes."

"The place was brilliantly lighted, wasn't it, when you saw me there at Reardon's?"

"It was," admitted Conroy sheepishly.

"And you admit, do you not, now that you have recognized me, that you talked with me for several moments?"

"Yes, I do; but I had been drinking."

"Don't you drink every day of your life?"

"I do."

"Yet, although you could recognize this prisoner after seeing him standing half-concealed in a doorway on a dark night, at a time when you passed him furtively and quickly, and when your attention was, no doubt, riveted mostly upon the policeman who was with him, you admit that you didn't recognize me to-night until after I reminded you of the circumstances of our meeting?"

The man remained silent, and Red Morgan shouted at him:

"Answer me!"

"Yes," he said; "I admit it."

"That's all," said Red.

"Boney Murphy," called Scotty, and the third witness took the stand.

"Murphy," he said, when the latter had taken a seat, "how long have you been a crook?"

"About three years."

"What was your business before you became a crook?"

"I was a fireman."

"Attached to what station, or engine-house, or whatever you call it?"

"I was attached to the engine-house around the corner of the second street from here."

"Are you acquainted with the firemen who are engaged in that engine-house now?"

"I know every one of them."

"Do you see them frequently?"

"I drop in there once in a while, to chat with them."

"Do they know what your present business is?"

"Not much, they don't!"

"Have you called at that engine-house lately?"

"I was there yesterday, in the afternoon, and also the day before, in the afternoon."

"Did you obtain any information there that has direct bearing upon this case?"

"I did."

"At which one of the calls there did you obtain that information?"

"At both of them. I heard part of it the first time, and I went back the second time to get more of it."

"What was the purport of that information?"

"It was to the effect that somebody had borrowed a ladder there about three o'clock, or a little later, during the same night when the nine chiefs of the third degree disappeared so mysteriously from this house."

"What led you to connect the story about the ladder that was told you at the engine-house with the events that had occurred here that night?"

"The story that I had from Conroy about the strange man talking with the copper in the doorway."

"What did you conclude from that?"

"I didn't conclude anything. I only thought that the two incidents might have some connection."

"Did you find out what was wanted with the ladder?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"Word was sent to the engine-house that it was wanted by some policemen."

"And did the firemen tell you that they loaned it for that purpose?"

"They did."

"Was the ladder returned to them?"

"It was."

"At what time?"

"About five o'clock in the morning."

"Who returned it?"

"A policeman."

"Did he make any remark to the firemen about what had been done with the ladder after it had been taken back to them?"

"Yes. He said——"

"One moment," interrupted Red Morgan. "Your honor, I insist that this witness cannot testify here to what the policeman may have said to the firemen. I am quite aware that it is impossible, under the circumstances, that any of the firemen or the policeman should be brought here to testify, but, at the same time, I submit——"

"That will do, Morgan," Peters interrupted him; "I'll admit the testimony."

"You may answer the question," said Scotty.

"The policeman told the firemen," continued the witness, "that that ladder had helped them to gather in a nice bunch of crooks."

"Did he say how many?"

"I don't think he did."

"But it was a bunch of crooks?"

"Yes."

"That will do. You may cross-examine, Morgan."

"Murphy," said Red, "why didn't the attorney for the prosecution ask you to describe the man who went after the ladder?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Well, since he omitted that question, I'll ask you to describe him. Who was it that went after that ladder in the first place?"

"It was a man, I suppose."

"Wasn't it a policeman in uniform?"

"Mebbe it was."

"Don't you know that it was?"

"No, I don't."

"Weren't you told by the firemen that it was a policeman in uniform that came after that ladder?"

"Yes, I was."

"That will do. You may step down."

"That closes my case, if your honor please," said Scotty, turning and facing Peters, and he took his chair, while Red Morgan stepped forward to open the case for the defense.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SENTENCE OF THE COURT.

"If the court please, and gentlemen of the jury," said Red Morgan, assuming the air and attitude of a practised attorney, and demonstrated that, although he had not followed Scotty's example in proclaiming himself a lawyer, he, nevertheless, was one.

"At the beginning of the trial of this case, which seems to be built entirely upon the imagination of a few suspicious characters who are so afraid of the uniform of policemen that they are not fit to belong to the fraternity of crooks, I offered objections to the methods, as well as to some of the statements, made by the attorney for the prosecution.

"But as it proceeded I discovered that it was unnecessary to do so, because I saw plainly that if he were given rope enough he would hang himself, as he has done.

"This case, gentlemen of the jury, is one which never should have been considered, much less brought before you in this solemn manner, in which the life of the defendant is at stake, for we all know, if you find him guilty and convict him of the offense you have charged, his life will have to pay the forfeit.

"The charge, as it stands against him, flatly stated, is that he conspired with a man called Ruddy Mike and with certain uniformed policemen against our organization, called the Order of the Python, with the result that nine of the chiefs of the third degree of that order have disappeared, and are supposed to be—mind you, are not proved to be—but are supposed to be under arrest and somewhere imprisoned, because of and through the endeavors of this defendant.

"That is a mere assumption, and as such is plainly preposterous.

"There has been no proof offered here by the prosecution that he has engaged in any conspiracy at all. The only thing that has been proved is that he was formerly a pal of the man whom you really suspect, and a man whom I do not know.

"The one damaging piece of evidence, the one damaging bit of testimony that has been offered and introduced here, is that given by Chris Conroy, in which he states that he recognized the man talking in the doorway to the policeman as this defendant.

"I have proved to you out of his own mouth that his statements to that effect are not to be relied upon, for, although I am red-headed, my face has character enough in it to be recognized by a person the second time he sees it; he didn't remember me to-day till I brought the recollection to his mind of a conversation I held with him in a lighted room four weeks ago in the city of Boston.

"I submit, therefore, that Conroy's testimony on that point is unimportant as establishing nothing, and I contend that, even if it were proved that the defendant did engage in a conversation with that policeman, as mentioned, it should have any bearing upon this case as proving nothing at all.

"The evidence of Murphy in regard to the ladder is circumstantial evidence pure and simple; that there was something on foot that night among the police of the city whereby certain men were made prisoners suggests to us the probable fate of the nine chiefs.

"But I must remind you, and do it as forcibly as is in my power, that it does not connect this defendant with this affair whatsoever.

"The prosecution stated in his testimony that he would prove that a man answering to the description of the defendant went to the engine-house to obtain that ladder, but when the witness is cornered he admits to you all that it was a policeman in uniform who went after it, and a policeman in uniform who returned it.

"The evidence in this case, as produced by the prosecution under the direction of its able exponent, is to the effect of what we hold; that the defendant did leave the back room down-stairs a half-hour or more before Ruddy Mike and the other men disappeared from the room on the second floor.

"I submit that nothing has been proven, and now, in behalf of the defense, I call the prisoner himself to the stand."

"He can sit right where he is, and answer questions there," said Peters, from the bench.

"Slick," said Morgan, "you have heard the testimony given here to-night, have you not?"

"I have."

"Did you leave the back room down-stairs that night, as described in that testimony?"

"I did."

"After whispering to Ruddy Mike, as was testified to?"

"Yes."

"Have you any objections to telling this jury what you whispered about at that time?"

"I'll tell the jury part of it; I cannot tell them all of it, as much of it is confidential between Ruddy Mike and myself, and I could not reveal it without his permission."

"Did you whisper about going out and leaving him there?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell us as much as you can about it?"

"He asked me to go out and do an errand for him. He had some things he wanted attended to that he wanted me to do, and he told me that he could not leave the place himself."

"Are you willing to tell us what it was that he wanted you to do?"

"No, I may not without his permission."

"When you left the house at that time, where did you go?"

"I walked straight up the street."

"Away from the building?"

"Yes; entirely."

"Did you encounter a policeman when you were walking up the street away from the building?"

"I did."

There was a little start in the room at this.

"Did you stop and talk to that policeman?"

"We talked together; yes."

"In a doorway?"

"No, we stood on the curb."

"Did anybody pass you while you were talking to him?"

"Nobody did."

"If Chris Conroy had passed you at that time, do you think you would have recognized him to-night?"

"I think I would, but I am not sure."

"How long a time did you talk with that policeman?"

"Not more than two minutes, at the most."

"Can you tell us what was said during that conversation?"

"He asked me what was going on at Mulvaney's."

"How did you reply to him?"

"I told him about the usual thing, I supposed."

"What else was said?"

"Very little more. We talked for about two minutes, and that was all."

"Where did you go then?"

"I went on my way up the street."

"Did you go to the engine-house on the second street from here after a ladder?"

"I did not."

"Did you carry a ladder to that engine-house at a later hour than that?"

"I did not."

"Were you at the engine-house at all that night?"

"I was not."

"Have you conspired with anybody against the peace and well-being of the organization known as the Order of the Python?"

"I haven't conspired with anybody about anything."

"That is all," said Morgan, and to Scotty he added: "The witness is yours."

"What is your name?" asked Scotty.

"You know that already," was the reply.

"What is your real name?"

"That is none of your business, and has nothing to do with this case," replied Patsy.

"Are you a crook?"

"I'm supposed to be one."

"Are you one?"

"No, sir; I'm a strictly honest man."

It is impossible to describe the air with which Patsy made this statement. He gave an inimitable expression to the remark, thereby conveying a very different impression from what the words themselves implied, and a broad smile appeared upon every face in the room.

Even Scotty was satisfied with it.

"Do you know anything about those nine men who disappeared from this place on the night in question?"

"I know all that I have heard about them here; yes."

"Do you know whether they were arrested or not?"

"I should judge, from the testimony of Murphy, that they were."

"Do you swear that you did not conspire against them?"

"I have already sworn that I did not conspire against anybody."

"Will you tell us when you saw Ruddy Mike last?"

"Yes; I've seen him twice within the last twenty-four hours."

"Why doesn't he come here?"

"You'll have to ask him that if you want to know."

"Did he know anything about Mulvaney's place?"

"Yes."

"What did he say about it?"

"He said, after he found out that I was coming here to-night, that he might show up himself, and I would not be a bit surprised if he were down-stairs now."

Nothing that Patsy could possibly have thought of to say would have produced a sensation such as this remark did now.

After all, it was not so much the man Slick that these men were trying, as it was Ruddy Mike; but their suspicions had driven them so far and to such extremities that, not being able to get their hands upon the one they were thinking the most about, they readily took his acknowledged pal and prosecuted him.

The moment he stated it as his opinion that Ruddy Mike was already below in the back room, there was not a man there who was not instantly anxious to descend and see for himself.

Even Peters, judge on the bench for this trial, was plainly anxious to get away, and would have said something to that effect, doubtless, had not the self-imposed dignity of his position restrained him.

Scotty was also visibly anxious, and he at once dismissed the witness, with the usual remark:

"That is all;" and instantly Red Morgan leaped to his feet to sum up the case.

"I'll give you five minutes to say all you've got to say," said Peters, with anxiety plainly depicted in his tones, "and then Scotty will have the same length of time, after which the case will go to the jury."

"If the court please, and gentlemen of the jury," said Morgan, "I, indeed, have very little more to say than I have already stated on this occasion. I must remind you, however, of the statements I made in my opening, and ask you to consider them carefully, and with a full sense of justice to this defendant and his rights.

"There has been no case proved here that should condemn anybody for anything, least of all has any evidence been admitted against this defendant which should even create a suspicion in your minds against him.

"If you follow the teachings of the law, as you are pretending to do in the trial of this case, you will remember that a judge always instructs a jury that the defendant must have the benefit of any doubt that exists.

"Here, in this case, there can be no doubt whatever in your minds of the entire innocence of this prisoner of the charge made against him, and so I say to you and I think the judge will charge you that you must acquit him."

Red Morgan took his seat in utter silence, and Scotty arose.

"Your honor," he said, "and gentlemen of the jury, I'll admit that this is a strange case, and that very little has been established here against the defendant and prisoner.

"But the fact remains that he is under suspicion of working against the interests of our order, and in considering his case we must depart from regular legal proceedings far enough that when a man like him is under suspicion, he is deemed guilty until he is proven innocent.

"I admit to you that there has not been sufficient proof adduced here to establish his guilt, but I must remind you that he has offered no proof at all of his innocence.

"That being the case, and taking the gravity of the affair into consideration, you must deal with him as you think best, remembering all the complications of the case and drawing your conclusions accordingly.

"I am satisfied in my own mind that we cannot afford to set this man at liberty under the circumstances, and so, my friends, I leave the case in your hands for your consideration."

Peters got upon his feet upon the platform, and, facing the six jurymen, charged them as follows:

"My lads, although we have tried to conduct this case according to legal forms, we must remember that this is not a court of laws. In weighing the testimony that has been given you, which would be speedily condemned if it were brought before such a court, you must take into consideration the conditions by which we are surrounded.

"There is no evidence here of the prisoner's guilt. There is no evidence that any court of law could convict him; but we must adopt the old Roman principle, where it is necessary, in order to liberate a man charged with a crime, his innocence should be proven.

"If this man who is a prisoner here is not proven guilty, neither has he established his innocence, and we, as his accusers, are left in precisely the same position as we were in the beginning with regard to it.

"I say to you, in making this charge, that we'll fall short of our duty to each other if we set him at liberty until we know more concerning his guilt or innocence.

"But, on the other hand, neither should he be condemned to suffer the extreme penalty for the crime with which he is charged, and I, therefore, recommend to you that you find your verdict according to the evidence on both sides as you have heard it, and that you leave his fate in my hands."

He took his seat, and for a moment there was a deathlike silence in the room, and then the six jurors left their chairs and filed slowly toward a distant corner of the hall, where they stood for several moments in whispered deliberation; and after that they retraced their steps to their chairs again, and one of them, who had been chosen as foreman, announced:

"We find the prisoner's innocence of the things charged against him not established, and we recommend that he be confined in some secure place until such a time as his companion and pal, Ruddy Mike, may be brought before a tribunal like this one for trial. We are unanimous in this opinion, and in giving it we are trying to carry out the advice of the presiding judge."

Again Peters arose slowly to his feet, and addressed Patsy this time.

"Slick," he said, "stand up;" and Patsy arose to his feet on the box in the center of the room. "The court," he continued, "quite agrees with the jury in the verdict it has rendered, and in view of all the evidence that has been introduced at this trial, you are sentenced to imprisonment for an indeterminate term, the same to be settled upon as soon as further evidence may be found; and I appoint myself as a committee of one to be your jailer."

CHAPTER VII.

PATSY TAKES HIS MEDICINE.

"Slick," said Peters, as he was about to dismiss the court, "you will be given five minutes for consultation with Red Morgan. You will occupy those five minutes in preparing any messages that you would like to send to any person, and in making what arrangements you please for an absence which may be protracted. After you have done that I will take charge of you, and you may be sure that you will not be at liberty again until it is my pleasure or I feel it my duty to release you.

"I should say this, in addition, that, were you a member of the organization you have offended, you would at once be turned over to the highest tribunal of that order you have offended, and it would most likely go much worse with you there than here."

A moment later Patsy and Red Morgan had withdrawn apart from the others, and entered upon a low-toned conversation.

"I did all I could for you, Slick," said Red apologetically; "but you were condemned and sentenced before the trial began."

"I know that," admitted Patsy; "the point I want to know now is what they intend to do with me."

Red Morgan smiled.

"Don't you worry about that," he said. "Whatever is done with you, I'll find out, and you may rely upon it I'll remain your friend throughout. Now, is there any-

thing you want me to do for you before you are taken away?"

"Yes," said Patsy, "there is."

"What is it?"

"I want you to find Ruddy Mike for me."

"I'll do that if he is to be found anywhere at all."

"The probability is," said Patsy, "that he is downstairs in the back room at this very moment."

"So much the worse for him, then," grumbled Red Morgan; "for these fellows are in a bad temper against him, and I am afraid it will go worse with him than with you."

"He is better able to take care of himself than I am, Red."

"I don't know about that; you conducted yourself splendidly."

"I owe a great deal to you, Red, and I'll not forget it."

"Oh, that's nothing, old chap."

"It will be all right, you may be sure of that, Red. The day will come when you might need such a friend as I may be."

"What do you want me to say to Ruddy Mike?"

"I want you to tell him word for word, and as literally as it can be done, everything that has occurred from the moment we met each other in East Houston Street."

"I'll do that."

"Tell him as nearly as you can remember all that has been said and done, with the names of those concerned and as nearly as possible what each one had to say."

"I will."

"Tell him that I sent you to him. Tell him I want him to treat you in all things just the same as he would treat Slick, but not exactly in the same manner that he would treat a certain friend of mine whose name is Patrick."

"Eh? What's that?"

"Can you repeat that part of the message word for word, just as I gave it to you?"

"I think so."

"Will you do it?"

"Yes, of course; but who is Patrick?"

"Patrick is a friend of Ruddy's, and Ruddy will understand exactly what I mean by that message."

"But what do you mean by it?"

"I mean things that are for your good, and if I should tell you all of them you would think I was throwing bouquets at you. I don't want to get you conceited by letting you know how much I think of you, and how much I want Ruddy Mike to like you, too."

"All right. I'll give him the message, but don't you think you better write a line to him?"

"Yes," said Patsy; "if you've got paper and pencil. I haven't."

Red Morgan produced both, and Patsy wrote rapidly the following message:

"DEAR RUDDY: The bearer of this is Red Morgan, of Boston, about whom I have said so much to you. He is a loyal fellow all through, loyal to me and loyal to the backbone to all his companions, friends, and pals. I want you to treat him the best you know how, to fight his battles for him, and to let him fight some of yours. I think you will understand all that this message means.

"SLICK."

He read the message through carefully twice to himself, and then drew a double underscoring mark beneath the word "some" in a sentence where he had suggested that Red be permitted to fight some of the detective's battles.

Reading between the lines, from our standpoint, it is easy to see precisely what Patsy meant by this message.

He meant that he had a great personal liking for Red Morgan; that he believed Red, notwithstanding his criminal career, to possess sterling qualities which should be fostered; but he wanted to warn Nick against taking him too far into his confidence, for he understood perfectly well that Red would not stand for a moment for anything that would appear to him like treason to his associates.

"Is that all the message you want to send to Ruddy?" said Morgan.

"Yes," said Patsy, "that about covers it."

"Now, is there anything else you want me to do?"

"I only want you to do as you told me you would, and keep tabs as nearly as you can on what Peters does with me."

"I will."

"Have you any idea, Morgan, what he intends to do?"

"No; only it goes without saying that he has got some safe place where he means to imprison you, from which he feels sure that you cannot escape, and where he intends to keep watch over you until your ultimate fate is decided."

"All the same," said Patsy, "I shall make every effort possible to escape from that prison, wherever it is."

"Sure thing, Slick; and so would I, in your place."

"And what will you be doing in the meantime?"

"I? I shall be trying to find the place, and when I do find it I won't be long in getting you out of it."

"In doing that won't you offend the order you belong to?"

"Possibly; but I'll take my chances as to that."

"You may get yourself into a worse pickle than I am in, Red."

"I'll take my chances of that, too."

"Don't give yourself any trouble about me," urged Patsy.

"Don't you worry about that, old pal. I know what I'm up against, and I think I can guess pretty nearly what you're up against, and as sure as my name is Red Morgan, I'm going to try and get you out of it."

The two clasped hands, silently looking into each other's eyes as they did so, and they formed a friendship then and there that was destined to be of benefit to them both, and which was ultimately to change the entire course of Red Morgan's life.

"One more word, Red," said Patsy, as they were turning away from each other.

"Well, what is it?"

"If, when you go down-stairs with these others, you find that Ruddy Mike is there, stand by him, for my sake."

"I'll do that, Slick."

"Warn him, if you can, of the danger that menaces him, and give him a chance to avoid it, if possible."

"I will."

"If once they could bring him into this room, as they got me here, he will stand very little chance of getting away again."

"I know that."

"And so, if it is possible, warn him in time, so that he may not fall into their clutches as I did."

"I'll see to it all, Slick; you may trust me thoroughly."

"I do."

"The five minutes is up," called Peters, from the other side of the room, and they turned about and faced him.

"We're all through," announced Red Morgan, "and before we leave this room I want the permission of the judge of this court to perform one service for the prisoner."

"What is it?" asked Peters.

"Slick has given me a message—a verbal one—to deliver to Ruddy Mike when I see him. He has also given me a message in writing to deliver to him, which you may all read if you care to do so," and he passed it over to Peters.

"What is the permission you wanted?" asked Peters, before reading the message.

"This," said Red Morgan: "If when we go down-stairs, we find that Ruddy Mike is there in the back room, I want permission to call him to one side and deliver my messages before any trouble of any kind is made for him."

"I guess that's all right," said Peters, looking around toward the others from one to another.

They nodded their heads in assent, and then Peters spoke again.

"There is nothing in this written message that may not be given to Ruddy Mike," he said. "I will read it to you;" and he did so, and passed it back again into Red Morgan's hands.

"Now," he continued, "you may all go down-stairs to the back room, leaving the prisoner here with me. I will ask Scotty to remain here, to assist me with him to the place where I shall keep him until he is wanted."

The men who had composed the court, jury, and audience filed slowly from the room, led by Red Morgan, and in another moment Patsy found himself alone in the room with Peters and Scotty.

"Slick," said Peters then, "are you going to take your medicine quietly, or are you going to make trouble?"

"That depends upon what kind of medicine you propose to give me," replied Patsy.

"I'll tell you what that is, Slick, and it rests with you whether you will go quietly and submit with grace, or if I shall be compelled to use force."

"Well?"

"You are not to be taken out of this building. Down in a sub-cellar under it there are two or three rooms that were created there for the purpose of holding men imprisoned when it should be necessary to do so. If we were jailers, we would call them dungeons, although a dungeon is supposed to be an exceedingly uncomfortable place, while these rooms have been made as comfortable as possible."

"That sounds all right, so far," said Patsy, smiling.

"The rooms were made," continued Peters, "to accommodate prisoners who were held for ransom, or for other purposes, by the people who constructed them. It is in one of those rooms that you will be imprisoned."

"That doesn't sound so bad," said Patsy. "If I have plenty to eat and drink, with a light and something to read."

"You shall be provided with all those things. I will wait upon you myself, and Scotty and I will be the only people alive who know where you are."

"Go on," said Patsy; "what more?"

"Those rooms that I have referred to are secret hiding-places. The men who created them and made use of them are dead or in prison, and Mulvaney and I are the only ones who know of their existence. Scotty is hearing about them for the first time."

"That's no dream," admitted Scotty.

"We found them by accident," Peters continued, "and nobody knows when they were dug there almost out of the solid rock, and nobody knows why. So far as their being used to imprison people who are held for ransom, that is only a guess."

"Then why did you tell it all to me?" asked Patsy.

"I tell it to you because I want you to understand that, once you are imprisoned there, you might as well give up and take it easy until you are set at liberty, for you will be absolutely without hope of escape."

"I'm onto that, all right, Peters."

"I'm glad you are."

"There's only one thing about it that bothers me," continued Patsy. "I'm wondering what would happen to me if you and Scotty and Mulvaney happened to get pinched."

"You would probably starve to death," replied Peters grimly.

"Well, then," said Patsy, laughing, "here's hoping you'll not run afoul of the coppers."

"I'll try not to, you may be sure of that; but one can never tell when that is likely to happen."

"Then, for goodness sake, stay under cover, won't you?"

"Oh, yes, I'll do that, and it isn't likely that Scotty, Mul, and me will all be pulled in right away."

"And if you are——" Patsy began, when Peters interrupted him with a laugh, and replied:

"That is a chance you've got to take."

"Well, I'm ready," said Patsy.

"It's my duty to blindfold you, Slick," said Peters, taking the same handkerchief from his pocket with which his own eyes had been bandaged in the proceedings of that night.

"That's all right," said Patsy, and in another moment the bandage was bound tightly over his eyes.

"Now," said Peters, "put your hands behind you, so that I may tie your wrists together. I don't want you to forget your promise to submit quietly to what I shall do."

"Are you going to leave me bound and blindfolded, and perhaps gagged?" inquired Patsy.

"No, there will be no gag used unless you try to make a noise while we are going below, in which case I will take occasion to put a knife between your ribs; the handkerchief and the bonds on your wrists will be removed as soon as we get you inside the room."

The reader of preceding stories in this series already knows something about the secret stairs and passages within the building known as Mulvaney's Cover. He knows that it was a network of secret passages, sliding panels, movable door-casings, and that it had been provided with every known method of quick escape possible.

In descending to the prison-room where Patsy was to

be confined until such time as he should be wanted, or until, in the event of the arrest or death of his jailers, he should perish miserably, only the secret passageways of the building were utilized, and, therefore, no person was encountered during their short journey; and presently, when by the dampness Patsy knew that they were far below the surface of the earth, he heard the metallic sound of the opening of an iron door, and his prison-house was reached.

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK CARTER FINDS AN UNEXPECTED FRIEND.

Nick Carter, in his disguise as Ruddy Mike, arrived at Mulvaney's Cover and walked to the great back room about half an hour after it was almost entirely emptied by the departure from it of the men who were to try Patsy for the offense he had committed against their order, and who were ultimately to condemn him to imprisonment, as we have just seen.

When he entered the place it was, therefore, almost deserted.

A few frequenters had strayed into it since the others went out, but, counting them all, there were only six there besides Mulvaney himself, who was seated in his accustomed corner, in the huge armchair, and who seemed to be lost in unpleasant meditation.

So deeply was he engrossed by his thoughts that he did not notice the entrance of Ruddy Mike, and was not aware of his appearance there until Nick slapped him heartily on the shoulder, and exclaimed:

"Hello, Mulvaney; how are you?"

The voice, the gesture, and the manner of the man told Mulvaney instantly who it was that had accosted him, and he leaped to his feet with wonderful agility, and confronted the detective.

"It's you, Ruddy?" he exclaimed, as if still uncertain of Ruddy Mike's identity.

"That same," replied Nick, laughing.

"Will you take a bit of advice from me, Ruddy?"

"I will, Mul, for sure."

"Then cut for the tall timber just as fast as your legs will carry you."

"What's that?" asked Nick.

"Mosey; vamose; skip; cut your cables; light out; get!"

"Are you suffering with indigestion, Mul?"

"I am in my conscience."

"Sure, you look it. What is it all about?"

"They're after you, Ruddy."

"Who's after me?"

"The men who come here to this place."

"Sure, then, they won't have much trouble in finding me, for I'm here."

"It's just that I don't want you to be, Ruddy."

"Why not?"

"Because they mean you harm."

"Sure, I'm not afraid of them."

"I know that, Ruddy, but the fact that you're not afraid of them won't save you."

"Then mebbe me muscles will."

"Sure, Ruddy, you haven't a chance against them: there are too many men against you."

"What's eating them now?"

"They are all sore on you for the things that happened here the last time you were in this place."

"Why? Because I called the nine chiefs out of the room up-stairs to interview them?"

"Yes; and the things that happened to the nine afterwards."

"What happened to 'em?"

"Don't you know?"

"I know that Black Morgan brought them to the room up-stairs where I was waiting for 'em."

"Do you know any more than that?"

"I know he brought them to me one at a time."

"Is that all you know?"

"Sure, it is not."

"Tell me the rest of it."

"I'd tell you if I only knew what it is you're after."

"Where did the nine go after you were through with 'em?"

"Sure, Mul, you'll have to ask that of the nine themselves; devil a bit do I know."

"How did they leave the building?"

"They went out by the window, so they did."

"By the window? How was that?"

"It was the easiest way out, and the quickest."

"How did they get out?"

"Sure, they climbed down a ladder, Mul."

"Yes," said Mulvaney, "they climbed down a ladder into the arms of a policeman who was waiting below."

Nick Carter managed to imitate a most hearty laugh at this.

"That was a good one, wasn't it?" he asked.

"It might have been for the coppers," said Mulvaney indignantly.

"Coppers, you chump of the worrld!" exclaimed Nick. "Isn't that who was waitin' for them?" asked Mulvaney.

The detective closed one eye, and held it so while he asked:

"Mul, did you ever happen to see two or three men dressed up like coppers, in order to fool the police?"

"I have," said Mulvaney.

"Did you think it was a trick that couldn't be played again?"

"I hadn't thought of that."

"It's a favorite pose of mine, Mul."

"Is that what happened, Ruddy?"

"Sure, Mul, it happened so well that, if you'd walked along past the window at the moment when any one of the nine were descending by the ladder, you'd have been willing to swear a solemn oath that a bunch of coppers were waiting below for each one of them."

"Did you succeed in fooling the policeman on the beat?"

"Sure, Mul, we fooled everybody."

"Where did you get the ladder?"

"From the engine-house around the corner."

"Who got it?"

"A blue coat, no less, with brass buttons and shield, and night-stick and helmet, and the whole make-up to beat the band."

"'Twas a fine trick, Ruddy."

"I thought so myself, Mul."

"It's likely to get you into a world of trouble."

"Sure, I thought it might do that; but I says to myself: 'Mulvaney is smart enough to understand, and sure he'll make the others do the same.'"

"That was kind of you, Ruddy, and mighty flattering; but I don't understand it any better than they

did, and, after all this talk, my advice to you is just the same as it was when you first came into the room."

"What was that? Sure, I have forgotten it."

"Skip out as quickly as you know how."

"But why?"

"Because they've got it in for you, for sure."

"What'll they do to me?"

"I'm not sure that they won't slit your throat for you, and, in fact, I think it's more than likely that they will."

"What would I be doing in the meantinfie?"

"That's hard telling, Ruddy; but there are too many of them for you."

"All the same, I'm not made of the stuff that runs."

"I know that, and if you've made up your mind to stay, you will; only don't you ever say that I didn't warn you."

"I won't, and now tell me something."

"What is it?"

"Has my old pal Slick been here to-night?"

"He has."

"Did he leave a message for me?"

"He did not."

"When did he go out?"

"He didn't go out."

"Do you mean he is in the building still?"

"I do."

"Where is he?"

"Up-stairs, undergoing a trial."

"A trial! For what, Mul?"

"For the same offense they charge against you."

"Sure, did they think he was mixed up in that, too?"

"They did, and they're mighty likely to prove it, at least, to their own satisfaction."

"Who's tryin' him?"

"Peters and Scotty and the rest of the gang, and Red Morgan, Black Morgan's brother, from Boston, who came in here to-night with Slick, is with them, too."

"Do you think that it's likely to go hard with Slick, Mulvaney?"

"I'm afraid it is, Ruddy."

"Then, don't you see, Mul, that I couldn't go but and l'ave the poor lad here alone, without a friend to speak a good word for him?"

"Yes, I see your view of it."

"Well, then, I'll stay and face them all down. Sure, they will come back to this room when they have done with Slick, and they're not likely to murder him off-hand?"

"I don't know what they'll do any more than you, Ruddy, but you won't have long to wait to find out, for I hear them coming now."

"Will you stand by me, Mul?"

"I will as far as I can."

"If the worst comes to the worst, you don't want a regular knock-down-and-throw-out fight in this place, do you?"

"You bet your life I don't and I won't stand for it either."

"Then can you suggest a way that I can get out without their catching me if I want to do it?"

"I don't know about that, Ruddy, for in that case they wouldn't hesitate to use me the same as they would you."

"Then, Mul, I'll tell you that if the lot of 'em are too obstreperous, sure there'll be a fight here such as you never saw before."

"I'll tell you what you can do," said Mulvaney, "and we'll have to talk quick, for the whole push will be here in a moment."

"Get it out of you, then."

"Behind my chair, there, Ruddy, is a secret door in the wainscoting that I have never used when anybody was in this room. It's a get-away of my own that I've provided for an emergency. Under the edge of that bar where you're leaning, if you'll feel there, you'll find an electric switch."

"Correct," said Nick, feeling for it.

"That turns off every light in the room; now, step this way."

He went close to the casing and touched softly with his finger the head of a nail that was apparently imbedded in the wood.

"If you press that, Ruddy," he said, "after you have turned the switch, the door in this wainscoting will open away from you so that you can step through; then you must close it after you."

"That's a good idea," said Nick.

"You'll find yourself at the head of a narrow flight of stairs. Put your right hand on the wall next to it and keep to the right down the stairs and along the passageways you will find until you get to an iron door in a solid wall. You can open that door easily by removing the latch and the bars that are across it. It will admit you to a small room, where you can remain until everything is quiet and then return here and make your way out at your leisure."

"Yes," said Nick; "but won't the door to the small room be latched behind me after I pass inside?"

"I most forgot that," said Mulvaney, chuckling. "The little room I mentioned has a rug on its floor; pull the rug aside and you'll find a flat white stone in the middle of the floor. If you press hard on the corner of that stone nearest the door by which you entered the room, the opposite corner of it will raise up sufficiently for you to get your finger under a ring that is there. Pull on that ring, lift the stone from its place, and you'll find a way of escape open to you; only as you go down be sure and put the stone back as you find it."

"Correct," said Nick. "I'll do all that."

"And now, Ruddy, be on your guard, for here they are!"

And at that moment the door opened and admitted the men who had so lately tried and condemned Patsy.

CHAPTER IX.

NICK CARTER HEARS THE INDICTMENT AGAINST HIM.

The men filed into the room solemnly as if they had been deeply impressed by what had just happened, and the appearance of Ruddy Mike was not noticed until they were all well inside, notwithstanding the fact that they had really descended in the expectation of finding him there.

Nick remained in an easy attitude, leaning upon the end of the bar, close to Mulvaney's chair, which the latter had moved a little distance away, so that it no longer protected the approach to the secret passageway he had described to the detective.

Contrary to Nick's expectations, there was no appearance of exultation in the manner of the men when they discovered him.

There was only an expression of sullen determination

in their faces, and in that moment the detective realized that they were fiercely resentful toward him, and that it would be a question of fight or escape before very long.

They moved forward, gradually forming themselves in a half-moon shape before him, until they entirely encircled all visible means of escape; and then they paused, silent and solemn, and turned their eyes expectantly upon Red Morgan.

It was the first intimation that Red had received of the identity of Ruddy Mike; but he understood at once and he stepped two paces forward in advance of his companions.

"Are you Ruddy Mike?" he asked.

"I am," said Nick. "Who are you?"

"I am Red Morgan, Black Morgan's brother."

"Good," said Nick. "I'm glad to meet you."

"I've got a message for you, Ruddy," continued the Bostonian.

"From Slick, is it?"

"It is."

"First, tell me is he all right and unharmed?"

"Yes."

"Then, be so kind as to give me the message."

"There are two of them," said Red; "one of them is written and the other one is oral. I'll give you the written one first; here it is."

Nick read the message that Patsy had written twice carefully; then he tore it into little bits and dropped it upon the floor.

"Thank you, Red," he said; "and now, I'm twice glad to know you. Sure, if you'll give me the other message he sent to me I'll be thankful to you."

Red stepped forward until he was close to Nick, and in a low tone, so that the others present could not hear him, delivered the message almost word for word as Patsy had uttered it.

When he had finished, he added:

"And now, Ruddy, I've a lot more to tell you; acting under the instructions of Slick, I must tell you all that has occurred since the moment I met him in East Houston Street."

"I will be very grateful to you," said Nick.

Morgan began then at the commencement and told the tale all through rapidly and concisely, just as we know it, but grouping his facts together so systematically that it required very little time for him to cover the ground thoroughly. At the conclusion, he added this:

"It is my advice to you, Ruddy, to make an appointment with me in some other part of the city and for you to slide out of this, if you can, at the very first moment that offers."

"It doesn't look now as if I'd very much of a chance to do that," said Nick, smiling.

"It doesn't, that's a fact, but if you're careful, an opportunity may offer and if you take my advice you'll make the most of it."

"I'll do that."

"And if you succeed, where shall I meet you and when?"

"If I get away;" said Nick; "——if I take French leave of these fellows without their permission, as I'll do now if I have the chance, meet me at Tim Flynn's place in Nassau Street at half-past four o'clock in the afternoon."

"I'll do that."

"Do you know where it is, Red?"

"No, but I can find it."

"One more word, Red, before we let these fellows do any talking."

"Yes?"

"Slick says in the message he wrote, that he likes you."

"Well, I like him, too."

"What he says, Red, means a good deal to me, and once I am a friend to a man, I'm always his friend."

"I believe that, Ruddy, when I look into your eyes."

"Do I understand, Red, that if I do get a chance to make my escape from here, you are going to stand Slick's friend?"

"You bet your life!"

"Can I rely upon you to do everything that I would do if I had the same opportunity?"

"You may, implicitly."

"I won't forget you, Red, if you'll do that."

"I'll do it all right, pal."

"I believe you will, Morgan; but don't forget you may run up against the organization."

"I'm not forgetting it."

"And remember if you do that they'll handle you without gloves."

"I know it; don't I belong to it?"

"Yes, I know you do, and that's the reason I'm warning you."

"I can take care of myself, Ruddy, and I can take care of myself this time as well as ever I did."

"Have you any idea where they have taken Slick?"

"No; only I don't believe they'll take him out of the building."

"Will they do anything to harm him?"

"Not at present, although I wouldn't trust Peters very far, or Scotty either, for that matter."

"Are they to be his jailers?"

"Peters is, and I think he has taken Scotty into his confidence."

"Do you know where either of them hang out besides this place?"

"No; but I'll find out."

"Do that, and if the worst comes to the worst I'll get hold of one of them and make him talk up."

"First you catch your rabbit," said Red, with a grin.

"You mean that first I've got to get out of this place?" said Nick.

"I do."

"Well, I'll accomplish that all right. I know more about this place than they do, and almost as much about it as Mulvaney does himself."

"Mebbe you can find Slick's prison," suggested Morgan.

"I think I can; anyhow I'll try. These guns are getting uneasy," with a glance around at the others.

"So I see."

"I guess our confabulation has lasted quite long enough."

"I think so, too."

"There's one more word I want to say to you, Red, before we part."

"Yes? What is it?"

"I want you to step back over among the others, and no matter what happens during the next few moments, I want you to appear to be sided with them against me."

"That isn't keeping my word with Slick," protested Morgan.

"Nevertheless I want you to do it just as I have di-

rected. At least you should appear to be nothing more than neutral, but it will be better if you side with them. I am perfectly capable of taking care of myself, and I tell you right now that I will make my escape from this room if it is necessary when the proper time comes."

"Mebbe you can; at least, I hope so."

"Don't forget the appointment with me at Flynn's," said Nick.

"I'll not; I'll be on time if there is any hope of your being there to meet me."

With a meaning glance into each other's eyes, the two men separated, Morgan stepping back again and rejoining the group that confronted Nick, while the detective remained leaning idly against the end of the bar with his fingers close to the concealed electric switch.

For a moment there was dead silence in the room, while each man waited expectantly for another one to open the proceedings which were to follow.

It was plain that they were at a loss what to say or do without Peters, who was a natural leader among them, as has already been seen.

The silence had continued for the space of two minutes when Red Morgan turned and faced them.

"Pals," he said, "there don't seem to be anything for us to do just now, and we don't any of us know just how to do it; that's a kind of a Hibernianism, but it'll pass, and I move we wait where we are till Peters comes."

"Second the motion," said one of the men with a relieved laugh.

"In the meantime," said Nick, running his eyes slowly along the group from one end to the other. "I'll stand treat if the bartend will serve the stuff."

"We'll accept," replied one of the men, "provided it is passed over to us where we are. It's our duty, Ruddy, to keep you surrounded till Peters comes here, and I make a second motion that nobody moves from his tracks till Peters comes, except the barkeep who is to serve us with what we order."

"The motion is carried unanimously," said Nick, laughing aloud. "What's the matter with you, anyhow?"

"We've got to try you the same as we did Slick," said another man, who had not spoken until now.

"What for?" asked Nick.

"You'll find that out when we get you up-stairs," was the reply.

"Won't you tell me what you have done with Slick?" asked Nick.

"Hasn't Red Morgan already told you that?" retorted the man.

"He's told me part of it."

"Well, we tried him, and although we didn't find him guilty we didn't find him innocent either, and he's got to be put away somewhere and looked after until after we've tried you. His fate, as well as your own, depends upon what you have to tell us."

"That sounds fair," said Nick; "and I guess it will be all right."

"Peters is taking care of that, and you can bet your life it will be all right," exclaimed the fourth man.

There was some general talk among them while the drinks were being served, and just as the glasses were collected, a door at the rear of the room opened and Peters, accompanied by Scotty, entered and approached them.

"Is he here?" demanded Peters as soon as he was well inside the door.

"He is," replied Red Morgan.

Peters thrust himself quickly forward, piercing the center of the semicircle and came to a pause ten feet away from Nick Carter, facing him.

"Ruddy Mike, how are you?" he said; "I hope you are well."

"I am quite well, thank you," replied Nick, with a low laugh.

"Has Red Morgan delivered the messages he has for you?"

"He has."

"Have you been told that you were under arrest?"

"I have not."

"Then, I'll take the liberty of informing you of that fact now."

"Thank ye kindly, Mr. Peters. May I politely ask what I am charged with?"

"You are charged," replied Peters in a recitative voice, much as if he were reading the words from a written page, "with having conspired with others against the welfare of the organization known as the Order of the Python, and against the well-being of certain of its members and chiefs. That is the first count."

"Is there another?" asked Nick.

"You are charged," continued Peters, "with aiding and abetting the abduction and arrest of the great chief, Pollock. That's the second count."

"Sure, there's plenty of that. What's the third?"

"You are charged with aiding and abetting in the arrest of nine of the chiefs of the Third Degree of the Order of the Python."

"Is there a fourth one, Mr. Peters?"

"You are charged with the murder of Black Morgan!"

Every man in the room gasped aloud at this unexpected announcement. Red Morgan caught his breath and took a quick step forward, and Nick Carter himself stared in amazement.

"We all know," continued Peters calmly, "that Black Morgan never would have consented to a voluntary disappearance such as has been enacted, without leaving some word behind him, at least with Mulvaney. Those among us who know Black Morgan best are certain that only one thing could keep him away from us or from communicating with us, and that is death; and we are satisfied in our own minds that he is dead and that you killed him."

"That's all rot," said Nick.

"You'll be given your chance to prove that, Ruddy Mike, and you might as well be told now that there is only one way in which you can prove it, and that is by producing Black Morgan before us or by informing us where he can be found."

"Suppose I can't do that?" asked Nick.

"In that case, Ruddy Mike, you may rely upon it, we will lose no time in sending you to the same place where we think you have sent him!"

CHAPTER X.

THE DUNGEON AT MULVANEY'S COVER.

The men had crowded forward as they heard the indictment pronounced by Peters, and there was a certain element of suppressed excitement among them which surcharged the air with tragic portent.

Nick Carter felt this as much as any one present, and was instantly conscious of the fact that only for the

timely advice that Mulvaney had given him regarding a means of escape from that room, he would have had very small chance of preserving his life and liberty in the face of the antagonism, which amounted almost to hatred, with which these men confronted him.

The charge of the murder of Black Morgan, made so suddenly and so unexpectedly by Peters, had thrilled them all, and it was evident to the detective that it was not without its effect upon Black Morgan's brother, Red.

Red stepped forward quickly when Peters ceased speaking and stood with pale face and blazing eyes, looking straight at Nick Carter, while every man there waited in silent expectation for what he had to say.

"Ruddy Mike," said Red slowly and distinctly. "You heard Peters recite the last charge against you, did you not?"

"I did," replied the detective.

"He charged you with the murder of Black Morgan, my brother."

"He did."

"Are you guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty," replied Nick, returning the steady, fearless stare of Red Morgan.

"Have you got anything to swear by that is sacred to you?" demanded Red.

"I swear to you, Morgan, on everything I hold dear, that the charge is untrue; so far as I know, Black Morgan is as much alive and as well in health as we are."

"Do you know where he is, Ruddy Mike?"

"I do."

"Will you be able to produce him at this trial as a witness?"

"I will not."

"Why not?"

"There are reasons which I cannot explain."

"Is he where you could take me to him were you so inclined?"

"He is."

"Will you consent to take me to him?"

"I will promise you that I will take you to him as soon as I have been able to see him, obtain his consent and inform him of your wish."

"Enough of this!" cried Peters. "This isn't a trial. We will have that up-stairs in the Third Degree Hall, where we held the other one. Ruddy Mike, do you submit yourself as a prisoner?"

"I don't know why I should," replied Nick.

"You should for the reason that you cannot help yourself, and the question is whether you will go quietly with us to the Third Degree room, or shall we be obliged to take you there by force?"

"I think, Peters, that if you want to take me anywhere you will have to use force, and some of you will remember that it won't be any easy matter to do it."

"Do you defy me?" demanded Peters.

"No, I'm not defying you; I am merely telling you as gently as possible that it won't be safe for you to try this temper of mine too far. All this monkey business of trials by juries that are already determined what they shall do, doesn't go down with me a little bit. I'm not going up to that room with you fellows to be made a fool of as you succeeded in making one of Slick. You are up against a different proposition now, Mr. Peters, than you were when you had him, and I warn you and the others not to take a step nearer to me if you value your lives. You'll notice that my left hand is in my coat pocket, and for your pleasant information I will inform you that it is grasping the butt of a little five-chambered weapon, and that I'm a dead-shot with it from my hip. You can stand there, Peters, and say all that you have on your mind, but you'd better let it go at that and not monkey with me too far. I've got you covered now, and if you make a move against me, sure there'll be one less Peters in your family list."

He paused for a second, and as no one replied, went on:

"If you let me alone and allow me to stay among you as I have been in the habit of doing, it will all come out right; but if you think I'm going to put my head into the lion's jaws, as I would do if I went up-stairs with you now, you're a parcel of crazy fools, and that's all I've got to say."

Red Morgan could not restain his admiration for the man who thus dared to defy thirty of his fellows, all eager for his life's blood. His eyes shone as he took a step forward and then halted, remembering what Nick had said to him that he was to side with the others against Ruddy Mike.

Peters was rapidly recovering his poise of mind.

He was not a coward by any means.

He realized thoroughly that the man he knew as Ruddy Mike had doubtless spoken the entire truth when he referred to the weapon concealed in his pocket.

Nevertheless, he felt that he had a position to maintain as the acknowledged leader of that crowd and he intended to do so.

While the others waited in indecision, Peters was gathering his forces for an attack upon Ruddy Mike; he had not for a single moment altered his determination to have the trial proceed as he had arranged for it.

Suddenly, as they stood facing each other, Nick with his eyes alert and keeping in mind the slightest motion of every man that faced him, and Peters bending a little forward and half-crouching like an animal that is about to spring, the latter leaped forward, dodging as he did so, intending to avoid the bullet that he had no doubt would be sent at him.

But Nick Carter was prepared in a measure for this act.

He had read it in the eyes of his opponent, and when Peters started forward, the detective did the same, striking out straight from the shoulder with his right hand as he did so. His fist struck Peters on the side of the head, lifting him from his feet and hurling him backward like a projectile from a catapult, straight among his fellows.

At the instant the detective delivered the blow, he leaped backward again, and while he appeared once more to assume an attitude of leaning negligently against the bar, his fingers sought the electric switch beneath the edge of it. In an instant he had turned it with a sharp click, and the immense room was plunged into total darkness.

At once there was an uproar on every side. Hoarse shouts, curses and grumbles and exclamations of surprise came from every man there. During this momentary pandemonium, Nick Carter stepped swiftly past the end of the bar and began to feel with his fingers along the smooth surface of the wainscoting in search of the depression where the head of the nail was half-concealed.

He found it at once, because he had been careful to locate it before he turned off the switch, and, pressing

against it, at once discovered the opening through the wall. He smiled to himself in the darkness as he stepped through this opening, and, quickly turning, securely closed the secret door behind him.

Instead of passing immediately along the passageway he found there, he waited while he listened intently to what was passing within the room he had just left. He could hear questions asked and answers given; he could hear shouts and curses still, and presently there was a murmur of approval and exclamations of gladness which informed him that somehow the lights had been turned on again.

Then Mulvaney's voice came to him as the proprietor expostulated with Peters and his companions.

"Sure, there's a switch here," he heard Mulvaney exclaim, "but it's me that had no idea that Ruddy Mike knew about it. Its a secret contrivance of me own, boys, that I've always had ready at hand where I could reach it easily and turn off the lights in case the room was raided."

"But where has Ruddy Mike got to?" asked Peters.

"Mebbe he's hiding behind the bar," said Mulvaney.

Instantly there was a sound of shuffling feet in the room as the men rushed behind the bar in search of the man who had escaped them.

"Where has he got to?" yelled Peters again.

"You can search me," said Mulvaney.

"Is there a secret way out of this room that we don't know about?"

"Sure there may be a dozen of them for all I know," said Mulvaney. "I have lived here in this house four years, and thought I knew them all when I came, but there isn't a week passes that I don't find a new one that I've never discovered before."

"Ruddy Mike is not in the room!" yelled Peters with an angry curse.

"So I see," said Mulvaney. "Mebbe he went down through the floor or up through the ceiling, and then again Peters I leave it to your own good sense that mebbe he's had time, and I think he has, to make use of one of the secret passages out of here that you do know about."

"Search them, boys, search them!" Peters called out; and at once the sound of shuffling feet and other noises combined with it told the detective that the men were working all the sliding panels that were known to exist in that room. It occurred to him then that one of them might know of the existence of the secret door through which he had escaped, or that Mulvaney, believing he had gone by this time, might reveal it; and so he turned quickly away, sliding his hand along the right wall as he did so and religiously following the directions given to him by Mulvaney.

He descended the narrow stairway that had been described to him, passing along a narrow gallery, thence turning sharply to the right and descending a second stairway then to the right again along a second corridor and finally descending a third flight of stairs, this time made of stone, until at last he came to a cemented passageway, which by the musty smell of it he knew to be located far underground. This one led him a long distance in a straight line, and he presently came to the iron door set in masonry as Mulvaney had described it to him.

There was an iron bar across the front of it that worked like a latch across the side, where it opened, and there was also a heavy metallic latch beneath this.

Nick raised the bar and fastened it in place, then moved the latch and pulled open the door that was to admit him to the secret room.

He was surprised at the weight of the door, but discovered that it was faced on the inside by masonry to represent the interior of a cell, if such it might be called. He was about to examine it further when he was startled by an exclamation from the interior of the cell, and the voice of Patsy, instantly recognized by the detective with a thrill of gladness, cried out:

"Who is there?"

"Hush, Patsy," exclaimed Nick, "keep still until I close this door! Thank Heaven, I have found you!"

And the detective closed and fastened the door behind him implicitly believing in the remainder of the instructions that Mulvaney had given him.

CHAPTER XI.

PATSY HAS AN IDEA.

The meeting of the two detectives under such strange circumstances can better be imagined than described. Nick Carter was amazed by the result of his flight from the back room of Mulvaney's, and for once in his life he was rather dazed at the consequences of it.

He could only grasp Patsy's hand and shake it vehemently in the utter darkness, for Patsy had already extinguished the light with which he had been provided, and had half-prepared himself for the sleep and rest of which he stood so much in need.

The lamp was at once relighted, however, and Patsy lost no time in readjusting his clothing, so that in much less time than it takes to tell he was prepared to follow the detective in his continued flight from the place.

Nick, now that he had advanced so far in his escape, realized that at any moment he might be followed from the back room, either through the betrayal by Mulvaney of the secret passageway, or through its discovery by the others.

Nevertheless, as soon as Patsy was ready for the continued flight, they took the time to rearrange the room in the same order as it had been when Patsy entered it earlier in the evening.

None knew better than Nick Carter how thoroughly it counted in his favor to mystify such men as these against whom they were contending. There is always a certain uneasiness about the presence of a mystery which appals and frightens at the same time, and which is one of the best impediments in the way of searchers that can be provided.

The room rearranged, the rug was rolled carefully back, the detective first adjusting a clever little contrivance to the rug with a piece of cord and a bit of wire produced from Patsy's pocket in order that it might be pulled smoothly into place after their descent, and thus leave no clue as to their means of escape; and remembering perfectly the instructions given him by Mulvaney, Nick lost no time in disclosing the second secret passageway.

Having pulled the stone aside and arranged it so that he could replace it after he passed through the opening, the detective stood aside while Patsy descended upon a narrow flight of stairs; then, extinguishing the light, Nick made his way to the opening and presently he stood below the floor beside Patsy.

Then with a quick jerk of his cord, he drew the rug

smoothly into place as he had planned, and then carefully lifted the stone into place over his head.

"There!" he said. "That's done, and except for a possible wrinkle in the rug where the stone raised it a little until we replaced it, I think it will look as smooth as ever to any one who enters there."

"Sure," said Patsy, "and they'll walk on it before they notice it and spread it out finely for you with their feet."

Nick did not know it at the time, but he had succeeded in replacing the rug so perfectly that even his own sharp eyes would not have discovered any change in its appearance.

They now passed through a narrow corridor, which went in a straight line for a considerable distance, and finally entered into a vaulted chamber, and here, while they waited a moment and determined what to do, they plainly heard the sound of steps passing along the pavement over their heads.

"We are under a sidewalk," said Nick.

"Then we must be a good ways under it," replied Patsy, "for that cell-room in which I was a prisoner was down at least two flights under the cellar."

"That is true enough," explained Nick, "but you forget we have ascended a steep grade ever since we entered the subterranean passage under the dungeon."

Nick Carter, who never traveled anywhere without his electric torch, flashed the light around him now and discovered to his pleased surprise that the vaulted room they were occupying was nothing more or less than just such a receptacle which is made to store coal. In this present case it had never been used for that purpose, but it had been constructed in the same manner, and they could see over their heads the covering of the coal-hole which had been arranged there as an easy means of escape from the secret passage, while from the outside there was nothing about its appearance that could be viewed as suspicious. The hole was covered by an iron trap, and this was fastened below by a chain which let down to a hook in the wall.

Nick lost no time in displacing the chain from the hook, and then raising Patsy on his shoulders the latter moved the cover aside easily enough and bright daylight shone in upon them, but when Patsy thrust his head through the opening and peered up and down the street, he discovered that it was deserted, the hour being so early in the morning that the denizens of that district were not yet astir.

"See anybody?" asked Nick.

"Not a soul," replied Patsy.

"Then go on through the hole, and after you are outside reach down and give me a hand."

Patsy followed these directions, and five minutes later they both stood on the pavement in the street outside the building, with the iron cover replaced over the coal-hole and with the liberty of the street before them.

"We don't want to lose any time in hanging round here, I'm thinking," said Patsy, "at least unless we alter our appearance considerably."

"I guess you're right about that, my lad," agreed Nick. "What's the orders, chief?" asked the young assistant.

"Home," was the laconic reply, and they strode away rapidly along the street, each thankful that they had escaped so easily the unpleasant consequences of their night's experiences.

Both the detectives sought the rest they so much needed as soon as they arrived home, and it was not until four o'clock that afternoon that they were together again in Nick Carter's study.

"What are you going to do about it now, chief?" asked Patsy, lighting a cigar and disposing himself comfortably upon an easy chair.

"I haven't determined," was the reply.

"What is there to do?"

"Everything, my lad, for the reason that we have done nothing so far. Our night's experiences consisted of your getting into a peck of trouble and escaping from it by a narrow squeeze, and by my avoiding it by so narrow a margin that I cannot yet quite realize how it was done."

"How did you know about that secret passageway out of my cell, and how did you know that I was in the cell at all?" asked Patsy.

Nick related to Patsy all that had occurred in the back room, and told of the conversation he had had with the proprietor of the place; and Patsy in turn told his own story to the detective.

"What are you going to do next?" he asked Nick in conclusion.

"I'm going to break up that gang, Patsy," was the reply, "so thoroughly that it will never be reorganized."

"You have got to go back to Mulvaney's in order to do that, haven't you?"

"I certainly have, but the next time I go I shall take enough men with me, or have them ready at hand, to round-up that whole outfit so effectually that we won't have to make an ignominious flight from Mulvaney's Cover such as we were compelled to do to-night."

"That's a good idea, too," said Patsy, "if we could get a detail of a few coppers from one of the precincts and have them directed to act under your orders, we could surround the place and search it out like ferrets do rats."

"Precisely," said the detective.

"There's just one thing I'm anxious about, chief," said Patsy, after a moment's silence, "and I wish you'd do me the favor to consider it before you go into the details of the wholesale capture."

"What is it, Patsy?"

"I'm thinking about Red Morgan."

"What about him?"

"Red Morgan is a very superior character in many respects, chief."

"I don't doubt it; I thought as much myself."

"He stood by me like a major through all that trouble."

"So you have already intimated."

"More than that he trusted me implicitly in the face of all the accusations that were made against me, while if he had know the truth he would have been as savage as any of the others."

"That's his innate loyalty, Patsy."

"I think so, too, and say, chief——"

"Well, Patsy?" replied the detective.

"I want to save Red Morgan, if I can."

"Save him from what, Patsy?"

"I want to save him from himself."

"Do you think that is possible, my lad?"

"I'm quite sure it is."

"I should be only too glad to help you if it can be done. Tell me what your idea is."

"Red Morgan is not a criminal at heart, chief. He has been driven into it somehow by circumstances, and although he has been accused of murder; although his brother, Black Morgan, told me that he would be executed for the crime of murder if he were caught, I don't

believe that he ever did it, or if he did so I believe he must have been in some way justified."

"Perhaps so, but he is a burglar."

"Well, I'll admit that, but burglars may reform."

"They may, Patsy, but they don't very often."

"But Red Morgan may."

"Do you think," asked Nick, smiling, "that you can put the case to him so that he will see it as you do?"

"I think I could if we had him here."

"Ah, I begin to see now what you're getting at."

"This is what I'm getting at, chief, I want to go back to Mulvaney's to-night in some other disguise and try and see Red Morgan again for just a minute, and to make an appointment with him to meet me outside somewhere."

"By Jove," exclaimed the detective, "*I* had an appointment with him at four o'clock," and Nick looked hastily at his watch. "It's half-past four now, come on."

"But we are not disguised as Ruddy Mike and Slick, now."

"I know that," said Nick. "I thought you wanted to reform him."

"I do."

"Well, we can't do it in the characters of Ruddy Mike and Slick; we'll have to do it in our own characters, if we do it at all."

They went into the street, walking rapidly toward the subway and Patsy replied uneasily:

"He's sure to put up a fight when he discovers who we are."

"That's what I want him to do," replied the detective, laughing. "I'm going to reform him after the Sandy McGrath style."

"How's that?"

"With a club, Patsy. Sandy McGrath used to say that he was a peaceful man, and that he was always for having peace no matter what it cost, even if he had to lick every man in the crowd before he got it, and that is about what we'll have to do with Red Morgan."

CHAPTER XII.

THE REFORMATION OF RED MORGAN.

When the two entered Tim Flynn's place in Nassau Street, it was a few minutes after five o'clock in the afternoon, but they at once discovered Red Morgan seated in one of the chairs ranged along the side of the room, intently watching a game of billiards that was being played at one of the tables.

He glanced up indifferently as they passed down the room, and then resumed his inspection of the game.

There happened to be a vacant chair each side of him, and with a significant nod to Patsy, Nick Carter dropped into one of these, while the young assistant took the other.

Thus they remained for several moments flanking Red Morgan on either side and apparently as deeply interested in the game as he was. Presently after fifteen minutes more had elapsed, Red Morgan glanced anxiously at the clock, and then rose and walked toward the door, through which he presently passed with Nick Carter and Patsy following not far behind.

Morgan turned toward Broadway and entered the subway-station at that point, with the two detectives still following. Apparently Morgan had not noticed that others were dogging his steps, but at Fourteenth Street he got out of the express-train and took a local, and at Twenty-eighth Street—which could not have been better selected for the detective's purposes—he left the train and ascended to the street.

Nick and Patsy still followed him, and were not a little surprised when they reached the top of the steps to find Red Morgan standing there waiting them with flashing eyes and clenched fists, and with the attitude of one who was entirely resentful.

"Don't you think you two fly-cops have followed me about long enough?" he exclaimed. "Who do you think I am, anyhow?"

"I think," said Nick quietly, while Patsy withdrew to the background, "that you are Red Morgan, of Boston, and if you are, I'd like to have you come with me to a place where we can have a little private conversation."

"Oh, you would, eh?" exclaimed Morgan, with the flash of a hand toward his hip-pocket, but Nick Carter had seen the act and leaped quickly forward, and with a quick blow knocked his hand aside, and at the same instant caught him by both arms and with his great strength held Morgan as rigidly as if he had been a child in the grasp of a giant.

"You are Red Morgan, aren't you," demanded the detective in a low tone.

"Well, and if I am, what then?"

"Well, you are making a fool of yourself, that's all. You don't need to make any scene here, Red Morgan. I've got a message to deliver to you, and you are not under arrest and won't be, I promise you that. Anyhow, you're going along with me where I want you to go, and you're going to stay there at least until after breakfast in the morning."

"Suppose I don't take your word for that, what then?"

"Well, you've got to come along with me anyhow, even if I have to call the coppers to help me, and you'd be worse than a fool to tell me to do that."

"All right, I'll go and take your word for it."

"That's showing what I call horse-sense," said Nick.

"You've got a message for me?"

"Yes."

"From who?"

"Ruddy Mike."

"The devil you have!"

"That's what."

"Where is he?"

"He's waiting for you at the place I want to take you to."

"Is that straight goods, mister?"

"Straight from the shoulder, Red."

"All right, I'll go."

Then the three started together for Nick Carter house. At the foot of the steps leading to it, Red Morgan paused and looked at Nick uneasily.

"Is Ruddy Mike in there under arrest?" he asked.

"He is not and is not likely to be."

"Good, I'll go with you, but I'll be blowed if I understand it all."

They passed inside the house where Nick led the way directly up-stairs and into his own study, closely followed by Red Morgan, and Patsy bringing up the rear. Then Nick Carter wheeled and faced Red Morgan.

"Red," he said, in the voice of Ruddy Mike, "don't you know me?"

"Great guns!" exclaimed Morgan, starting backward. "You speak with the voice of Ruddy Mike."

"I am Ruddy Mike."

"Then who else are you?"

"I am Ruddy Mike, Morgan, just now disguised and under cover; turn around and look at the other man here."

Patsy, anticipating this event, had assumed as nearly as possible the attitude and expression of Slick, and now adopting the tones of that character, he exclaimed:

"And you didn't know me, Red! You wouldn't shake hands with me when we met!"

"Well," exclaimed Red Morgan, aghast, "I'll be eternally blowed!"

"Sit down, Red," said Nick. "I've got something I want to say to you, and I want you to promise me before I begin and that no matter what I say or do or no matter how astounded you may be, you will hold in that temper of yours till I have finished."

"You've got me completely dazed," said Morgan. "I don't know what to make of this business in the least. If you'll please be as explicit as possible I'll try to do as you ask."

"Will you answer a few questions for me first?"

"It depends upon what they are?"

"You call yourself a criminal, don't you?"

"I belong to a criminal organization."

"Frankly and honestly, Red Morgan, have you ever committed a crime? A real crime, I mean?"

"Yes; twice."

"What were they?"

"I robbed two houses in the suburbs of Boston."

"And is that all you stand guilty of to-day, Red?"

"That's all, Ruddy, if you are Ruddy, although if the organization should hear me say that they'd put me out of it."

"Will you tell me why you chose a criminal career?"

"I expect I was driven into it in one sense, and for another reason my eldest brother has long been one, and possibly his influence may have had something to do with it."

"Don't you regret that you ever started out upon such a career?"

"It's too late to do that now, Ruddy."

"Answer me, do you regret it?"

"I do."

"It's never too late, Morgan, to do right. It's always too early to do wrong. This may sound strange coming from me, but now we've got to a point where I must make a confession to you."

"Yes?"

"I am Ruddy Mike, as I have told you, but Ruddy Mike is a character that I have assumed for certain purposes. In reality, Morgan, I am Nick Carter!"

Red Morgan started as if he had received a blow, but he recovered himself before he had arisen to his feet, and sank back again upon the chair.

"I believe I more than half-suspected it all the time," he said with the calmness of one who has received a death-sentence, and knew that there was no reprieve. "And so I am under arrest after all, am I?"

"Under arrest, no!" said Nick. "You are at liberty to leave this house, this city, this state, and this country at any moment you see fit, or you are at liberty to remain here for the rest of your natural life if you wish to do so, and if you do so elect you will find that you have sturdy and lasting friends in Nick Carter and his assistant, Patsy Garvan, whom you know as Slick."

"Do you mean that, Nick Carter?" asked Morgan, leaning forward in his chair.

"I mean every word of it, Morgan."

"And all this because you are giving me a chance; because you want me to be an honest man and lead an honest life?"

"Yes," said Nick; "it's just because of that."

"And you and Slick here stand ready to help me do it?"

"We stand ready to make you do it if we can, whether you are willing or not."

"Heaven knows I'm willing enough, Mr. Carter, if I only can."

"You can and you will, Morgan. Shake hands with me now, and promise me that you will; and promise me that you will let me help you do it."

Morgan rose to his feet and thrust out his hand and grasped the detective's; and at the same moment he reached out the other hand and gave it to Patsy, who had advanced to receive it.

"I promise you both," he said huskily, "and thank you for making me do it."

"Heaven will bless you in doing it, Morgan; don't ever permit yourself to forget that," said Nick, "and now tell me, is Morgan your right name?"

"No; my right name is Moran."

"What is your first name?"

"My full name is Robert Emmet Moran, and I'm Irish born."

"And a lawyer, Patsy tells me."

"A barrister rather, and I'm a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin."

"Then, Red Morgan, I'll tell you what you'll do. You'll open a law office in the lower part of the city somewhere and get yourself admitted to the bar of the State of New York. You'll put out your shingle as Robert Emmet Moran, attorney and counselor-at-law, and the name itself will bring you business. And while you are waiting there for the clients to come, you'll permit me as a favor to advance you the money that is necessary to meet your expenses, and some day, when your profession pays you royally, you may return it.

"And don't thank me, Red, but rather praise Patsy's sagacity for being the first to discover the man that was behind the mask you have been wearing."

"And what of my brother, Mr. Carter? What of Black Morgan?"

"If you think you can induce your brother to promise to reform, I will readily advance him the money to leave this country, and I'll see to it that he is permitted to do so without suffering any further for the crimes he has committed."

"He is in prison now?"

"Yes."

"And the nine chiefs of the Third Degree?"

"Yes."

"And so," said Red Morgan, "it has been Nick Carter, after all, just as the men at Mulvaney's Cover suspected. It was you who captured Hogarth and the nine chiefs, and my brother, and it was your assistant, Patsy, who was tried for conspiracy?"

"It was," said Nick.

"Well," breathed Morgan slowly, "I am glad it is all over!"

THE END.

The next number (572) will be "A Bargain With a Thief; or, Nick Carter's Wildest Chase."

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

NEW YORK, December 7, 1907.

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STREET & SMITH, Publishers,
79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

Some years ago a newspaper man had this to say of the baby animals in Central Park, New York:

Of the really happy babies I am much inclined to consider hippopotamus Fatima the chief. She isn't pretty, but she has a sense of humor and all the milk and bran and bread she cares for.

She is on familiar terms with all the park commissioners and Doctor Conklin, who is the foster-father of all the animals exhibited by the city and county of New York. Hugh Downey is her guide, philosopher, and friend. He stands ready to play the game of "Where's my cap?" whenever she chooses, and he keeps drafts of cold air from her delicate little body. Her delicate little body, by the way, is as big as a railway car-stove and weighs two hundred pounds. Its skin is very dark-gray, almost a purplish-black in some places. It looks like old rubber boot-legs, much weather-worn and cracked and seamed and crisscrossed with several million wrinkles.

The hippopotami are not an early rising family. Old Caliph, the respected and ten-ton father of it, lives in the northernmost room of the suite. He is carefully caged off with giant iron bars, so that he may not pounce upon Fatima and crush her to death. Nobody knows why he should want to kill little Fatima, but this murderous propensity is common to all hippopotamus fathers.

Mrs. Caliph, Fatima's mother, rises from her couch of straw at eight o'clock every morning, and looks for something to eat as eagerly as the humblest housewife in the land. Then she wakes up Fatima, and gently shoves her toward the great stone bath-tub that occupies the south end of the family cage. Fatty doesn't squawk like most babies in the tub. She trots down the slope and splashes into the tepid water, and dives deep and stays under for a long time. Then she lets the top of her head and her funny little turned-up nostrils float on the surface for a long time.

Her keeper brings her a bran mash with chopped hay and crushed oats in it three times a day.

Mrs. Macacque, in the monkey-house, is the proudest mother in New York. She thinks her son Tommy is the brightest, sweetest child anybody ever saw—and doesn't he look like his papa and his Uncle Crowley? And as for cleverness, why he learned how to whirl around after his tail when he was only a month old, and he could actually climb a rope when he was two!

Tommy Macacque arouses his mama at seven o'clock every morning and chatters for his breakfast. His mama gives it to him, and then comes his toilet. She holds Tommy's long, thin tail in one of her hind paws and seizes his head firmly, but not roughly, with her left hand. Then with her right hand she brushes him thoroughly from head to foot. Tommy never objects. He rather likes the process. After the massage is finished, little Thomas walks around on his dear mama's shoulders, and occasionally sprints over her head. No matter how outlandish his tricks, she grins and chatters at them all with infinite good humor. When Tommy is neither feeding nor jumping on his mother, he takes little climbs up the family rope or on the wire front of the cage. His mother sits buried in happy reverie at these moments. The only outward and visible sign of her concern in the lad's welfare is the way she holds on to that thread-like tail of his. She never lets go of it for more than a few seconds at a time.

There is a creature who lives in the same building with the Macacques and fills Tommy with awe. It is the African porcupine. This porcupine has one negative virtue. He is not fretful, as his ancestral kinsmen were in *Hamlet's* day. He really isn't half so wicked as he looks. When he is attacked he projects all his gleaming quills toward his enemy. There they stand arrayed like the bayonets of a regiment of infantry prepared to receive a cavalry charge. Meantime, the porcupine is rattled. I use the word advisedly. Nature has provided him with a bunch of long and shrilly vibrant quills at the tip of his tail. When the porcupine is alarmed he springs this rattle at the moment he sets his bayonets in battle array. He is the funniest creature alive when he is enraged. He stamps his left hind foot furiously and tries to roar. His roaring is no louder than the soft and motherly cluck of a sleepy hen. It is worth any man's while to shake a stick at the porcupine and hear him rattle himself.

Those animals which are most difficult to obtain bring the largest prices in the market. A full-grown gorilla would, in this country, if such an animal were obtainable, cost, it is said, not less than $50,000, owing to the fact that these animals have not become sufficiently acclimatized to enable them to attain full growth. The $10,000 given by the late P. T. Barnum for the old favorite elephant, Jumbo, was the highest price ever paid for a wild animal. Barnum, it may be mentioned, realized over $200,000 by exhibiting Jumbo in America, and if poor Jumbo had not been run into by an engine while traveling through the country he would have been the means of swelling the bank-account of the circus people. Two specimens of the rhinoceros were sold not long ago for $7,000 and $6,000, respectively. The value of a good large hippopotamus is reckoned at $5,000. Giraffes are also expensive animals, costing nearly $4,000 each. It is,

unfortunately, one of the most delicate animals, and requires the greatest care. A good elephant is worth, in Europe, from $2,000 to $3,000; a well-trained animal will bring a higher price anywhere and at any time. A pair of zebras, which came from the hills of South Africa, recently cost $2,500; full-sized lions are to be had for from $500 to $1,500 each; a first-class pair of tigers would cost $1,500. The largest and best specimens of snakes sell up to $5,000 each.

THE SECRET FOE.

BY HARRY HAZELTON.

A terrible murder had been committed—a stranger had been butchered in a most merciless manner. The deed had not been committed by savages—that was evident from the appearance of the wounds upon the corpse, as it lay stretched beneath the spreading branches of a huge tree, by the river's side.

But who was the murderer? Upon whom could suspicion rest? About twenty men were gathered around the clay, and each one seemed to look suspiciously upon his neighbor, while "Judge Lynch" only awaited the proper evidence, and then would follow the condemnation and execution of him who had so cruelly robbed a fellow creature of life.

But those sealed lips could not speak—they could not tell whose hand had held the knife which had been driven through the clothing deep into the heart—they could not tell what hands, holding some heavy instrument, had stricken the blow which had crushed in the skull, leaving the brain bare and exposed to view. But such wounds were visible, and each of itself would have caused instant death.

It will be necessary to give a brief review of events previous to the night of the murder.

Richard French was a young man of more than ordinary intellect and refinement, and of noble bearing. He was of a romantic turn of mind, so, instead of settling down to the humdrum life of a New York merchant's clerk, he had started for the great West, with a few hundred dollars in his pocket, for the purpose of seeking his fortune.

The site selected by young French for at least a temporary residence was the bluffs upon the western bank of the Missouri River—the very spot where now stands the city of Omaha. But at that time a dozen cabins made up the settlement, and their inhabitants lived by hunting and by fur-trading with the Indians, whose homes were farther up the Platte Valley.

French confined himself entirely to the purchase and sale of furs, and he was never known to take advantage of the red men, but always paid them the full value of their wares. The result was that he soon monopolized the entire trade, and at the same time rendered himself an object of hatred to many who were not disposed to be even honorable or honest in their business. But he heeded not this, and, keeping on in the even tenor of his way, it was not long before he began to feel himself quite independent, for he could count his gold by thousands.

As almost every settlement has its belle, so had this one. Mary Starling was supposed to be an orphan, as her father was reported to have been lost at sea while she was yet an infant, and a mother's love she had never known. Mary had been adopted by a family named Warner, who had taken up their future home in the West but a few years before.

French and Mary were the best of friends, but the young man never discovered the fact that he loved her until he believed it to be too late. In his employ he had a clerk by the name of Ralph Hennings, and even before Richard had dreamed of such a thing, it seemed to be understood that Ralph was the accepted lover of Mary.

Then, for the first time, the fires of jealousy blazed up fiercely in the breast of French. His clerk became hateful in his sight, his hard-earned fortune seemed but dross—the only gem the world possessed was Mary Starling, and she was to be won by another. The very thought was maddening.

It was with feelings not easily described that the young man wandered down the river's bank late one afternoon, and, prostrating himself upon the ground, he gazed down into the deep waters, wondering if he could find peace of mind beneath its surface, and almost inclined to make the plunge and try the experiment. Then another thought came. If Ralph Hennings was out of his way, could he not win his wished-for prize, and thus secure happiness?

Such thoughts, however, were not permitted to find a lodgment in his brain. What right had he to be an enemy to Ralph? If he was the idol of Mary's heart, why should he wish to blast her life, or that of her lover? Such feelings were ungenerous—unmanly.

In a moment after he heard a well-known voice. Mary was approaching the spot, and she was singing. French drew back from sight, for not far distant he saw his clerk coming in the same direction. Here, probably, was to be a meeting by appointment. At first the young man was inclined to withdraw, for his nature revolted at the idea of being a listener, but something seemed to chain him to the spot, and he remained motionless.

Ralph came up, a frown upon his face, and he said:

"Mary, you were kind to come as I requested, for I do not wish any living soul to hear the words that pass between us. Now give me your answer, and let it be a final one. Will you become my wife?"

"I cannot, Ralph," was the calm reply.

"You do not love me?"

"No. I respect you—I even feel a sisterly regard for you—but I do not love you as I must love the man to whom I give my hand."

"But you will love me in time."

"No—never. Even now my heart is not my own."

"Tell me who it is you love?" cried Ralph fiercely.

"I do not know that you have any right to ask."

"I have. By the right of my love and misery I have a right to ask, and you must answer me. Is it not Richard French?"

"It is. He has never spoken to me of love—I do not know that he ever will. If he does not, I shall die without ever having become a wife; for I shall never so deeply wrong any man as to give him my hand, while my heart is in the possession of another. Now you have my answer, Ralph. Speak no more of love and we will be friends."

For a few moments the man stood in silence, gazing into the dark waters, and then, turning toward the young girl, he exclaimed:

"Mary, at the bottom of the river death lurks. I am going to seek the monster, but I am not going alone. You shall accompany me. Come!"

He seized her in his arms, but instantly releasing her again, fell on his knees before her, and cried frantically:

"Oh, forgive me—pity me—for your decision has driven me mad! But I will try to be calm, and I will never again speak to you of love until the proper time comes, if you will promise me one thing."

"What is it, Ralph?"

"Richard French loves you, and you will become his wife. Then I must live on in sorrow—but, oh, let me live in hope!"

"Explain your meaning."

"Life is uncertain. You may outlive Richard. I may do the same. If such should be the case, will you not reward my love and patient waiting by consenting then to receive me as your protector, even though you can only bestow upon me a second and a lesser love?"

"Ralph, that is a singular request. But I feel a deep sympathy for you, and I will give you such a promise. But——"

"What would you say?"

"Remember, Richard must never die a death of violence. If this should be the case, my promise does not hold good."

"Surely you cannot think me so base as to employ any harsh means?"

"No, Ralph. Forgive me for intimating such a thing, for I know you are the very soul of honor. But come—it is growing late; give me your arm and conduct me home."

The joy of young French was almost beyond bounds, for he had heard every word spoken. True, he almost felt as if Mary had signed his death-warrant when she made that promise, but still he could not bring himself to believe that Ralph would commit murder in order to gain his prize; and so he dismissed that subject from his mind. In an hour after he sat by the side of his idol. Words of love had been spoken, vows were exchanged, and the wedding fixed at an early period.

Two years had passed by—years of unalloyed happiness for the husband and wife, and years of prosperity as well. A child had been born to them, and it was now a winsome little girl six months of age, and, of course, the idol of its parents.

Ralph, the clerk, had made himself absolutely a slave. He was cringingly humble, and Mary pitied him from the bottom of her heart, and more especially so, as her husband had more than once expressed the opinion that he was but a sycophantic hypocrite, and would have discharged him from his employ but for the intercession of his wife. Ralph knew this, and it appeared to render him doubly grateful toward his protectress.

One night French was awakened from a sound sleep, and, starting from his bed, he gazed wildly around him. He had dreamed that he was suffocating, and that a glaring flame was searing his eyeballs; and now the reality was before him. His sleeping-room was dense with smoke, and he could see the crimson beyond, and hear the crackling of the fire. Not an instant was to be lost, and, seizing his wife in his arms, he dashed down the stairs and into the open air. Scarce had he reached it, when the cry broke from the lips of Mary:

"Oh, my child—my child—where is she?"

In his confusion the father had for a moment forgotten the infant. But now he dashed through the flame, up the burning staircase, and once more gained his sleeping-apartment. Half-unconscious from suffocation, he staggered to the bed where lay the infant, completely surrounded by the devouring element, but as yet unharmed. Clutching the child in his arms, the father turned again toward the stairs, but he heard them fall with a crash. Retreat in that direction being cut off, he turned and leaped from the window. But now all became dark, for the parent had fainted.

When he returned to consciousness he found himself surrounded by friends, and his weeping wife was near him. Almost the first question she asked was:

"Richard, could you not save our little one?"

"Yes—I leaped from the window with her in my arms. Is she not with you?"

"No—we have not found her—she is lost."

After a moment of thought, the father continued:

"I feel almost certain that she was in my arms when I leaped from the window, but still I am not positive, for I was half-unconscious, being far overcome with the smoke."

The infant was given up as lost by the parents, and the blow was a heavy one. But this was not the only one about to fall, for the fiend had commenced his work of darkness and of blood.

None appeared to feel a deeper sympathy for the mother than did Ralph Hennings, and his visits to her new home became quite frequent, while the hold he appeared to get upon the affections of the true wife was stronger than ever before. One evening he told her—and he went as he did so—that he could no longer remain in the employ of her husband. He felt himself a slave, and for his own happiness he must leave. Her reply was:

"I regret it, Ralph, but I cannot blame you. You have been very faithful, and by your attention to business the wealth of my husband has been greatly increased. You ought to be rewarded, and you shall be. I have just received a letter which informs me that my father is still alive. He was wrecked upon an island off the coast of Australia, and only recently has he been able to leave it and reach America. He comes back with a considerable sum of money, and will join me here in a few days. When he arrives, I will lend you sufficient to establish yourself in business, and you can be independent."

The actions of Ralph were very singular—almost unaccountable to Mary; but she looked upon them and his words as the natural outburst of a grateful heart, and thought little further of the matter. He fell upon his knees and exclaimed:

"Thank Heaven; you do love me and I am at length rewarded! You will be mine!"

Then, springing up, he caught her in his arms, drew her to his bosom, imprinted a kiss upon her lips, and, before she had time to recover from her surprise, offer any resistance, or utter a word, he had released her, and rushed from the house.

As he took his way homeward he muttered to himself:

"The second blow is struck. He saw me, and now the fires of jealousy will consume him, body and soul."

The husband had, indeed, been a witness of that scene. He was returning to his home, and, passing the window which opened into his parlor, he stopped, for he heard voices. He was just in time to hear the passionate words spoken by Ralph, and to see the embrace and kiss given. The clerk had caught a glimpse of the husband, and it

was solely for the purpose of arousing his jealousy that he acted and spoke as he had done.

French now began to look upon himself as having been a blind fool. But it was clear now. His wife was false to him, and he would cast her off forever. But his brain was feverish, and, instead of entering his home, now desolate to him, he wandered down to the river's bank, and here he passed one of the most wretched nights he had ever known. And morning brought him no relief save as he began to contemplate vengeance upon his destroyer.

Presently he started up from a reverie into which he had fallen, for he heard footsteps near him. He saw that it was a little Indian maiden whom he had often met, and she informed him that she had something very especial to communicate.

The story which she told was one of horror. It was as follows:

The night on which the cottage of French was burned the Indian maiden was returning to her own home in company with her father, having been on a fishing-excursion. They passed the rear of the dwelling, when they saw the parent leap from the window with the child in his arms, and fall senseless close to the burning mass.

At that instant Ralph Hennings came up, and seizing the infant he hurled it back into the flames. He was about to do the same with the parent, but for some reason the old Indian would not permit it.

"Great Heaven! why did you not tell me this before?" asked French.

"Because I dared not do it. Ralph bribed my father to silence, and so long as he lived I dared not betray the secret. He died last night, and so I may tell you now."

And this was the wretch who had won the affections of his wife—the murderer of his child—of her child. Was he fit to live? Certainly not fit to die; but he must die for all that, and that death should be immediate and terrible.

All that day did French search and watch for the villain, but he was not to be found. However, just as it was becoming quite dark, a small boat was seen to put off and head for the Iowa shore. It contained Ralph Hennings, and it was but a few moments before French was after him in another craft.

In the gloom French lost sight of his man, and for some time he rowed about from point to point, baffled in pursuit. But presently he heard the dip of oars. Swiftly he sped toward the spot. He leaped from his own craft into that of his foe just as it struck the Nebraska shore. A terrible blow was given with a knife which he held, and his victim fell back without even so much as a groan. At the same time the face of the murdered man was exposed. It was not Ralph Hennings.

"Great Heaven, it is a stranger!" cried French, as he rushed frantically away.

And the crowd now surrounded the murdered man. The body had been found near the river's bank, with the wounds upon it as described. It was supposed, too, that he had been robbed, for nothing of the least value was found upon his person, and nothing by which he could be identified.

After a few moments of silence, Ralph Hennings asked the question:

"Who among our neighbors are absent?"

"Richard French," was the reply.

"Why does not he come forward?"

"He is coming yonder?"

French had emerged from the forest close at hand, and was rapidly approaching the spot. His manner was wild in the extreme, and as he came up it was seen that his garments were stained with blood. A shudder ran through the crowd as he paused and gazed vacantly upon the corpse. Then the question was asked:

"Who committed this brutal murder?"

"I did," replied French, with a mild laugh. "Do you see this gash, which reaches deep into the heart? Well, here is the knife with which I gave the blow," and he held up the crimson blade.

"Did you also strike the blow which crushed in the skull?"

"No—I did not do that."

"Who is this stranger, and what was your motive for killing him?"

"I thought it was Ralph Hennings, the murderer of my babe—he who stole my wife from me."

The frantic man made a dash at his enemy, but he was prevented from doing harm.

Poor Mary had come up in time to hear the confession of her husband and his accusation; and, fainting, she fell to the earth.

At that moment the Indian maiden who had informed French of the murder of his child exclaimed, as she pointed to Ralph:

"Let that man be searched."

The villain turned deathly pale, but to struggle was useless, and soon a quantity of bills and valuable papers were found upon him, each one of which had been cut through the center by some sharp instrument, and the edges of the gashes were stained with blood. Through these the knife had passed. A further examination of the wound showed that the dagger's point had been thus turned aside, and the wound was by no means a mortal one. It was the blow upon the head which had caused death.

"And Ralph Hennings struck that blow," said the Indian girl.

In a moment more he was standing beneath that tree, with the fatal noose around his neck.

"Confess—confess," were the words addressed to him.

"I will," he answered, pale as death and quivering from head to foot. "This dead man was the father of Mary. I knew he was coming, I met him, and murdered him for his money. Scarce had I stricken the blow when I saw French coming up. I knew he came for me, and I leaped from the boat into the water. I was clinging to the rudder when he used the knife, but the man was already dead."

"Did you throw my child into the flames?" asked French.

"Yes, and intended to send you after her. I thought if Mary had no one left to love, she would cling the closer to me."

"And she is false to me?".

"No; she is as pure as an angel. She was as much surprised as yourself at the words you heard me speak, and at my acts. I knew you were listening and watching, and you can judge of my motives."

It is needless to say that the double murderer never committed another crime. In half an hour he was dead, and if Richard French and his noble wife could not easily forget those dreadful scenes, they were comparatively happy thenceforward.

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